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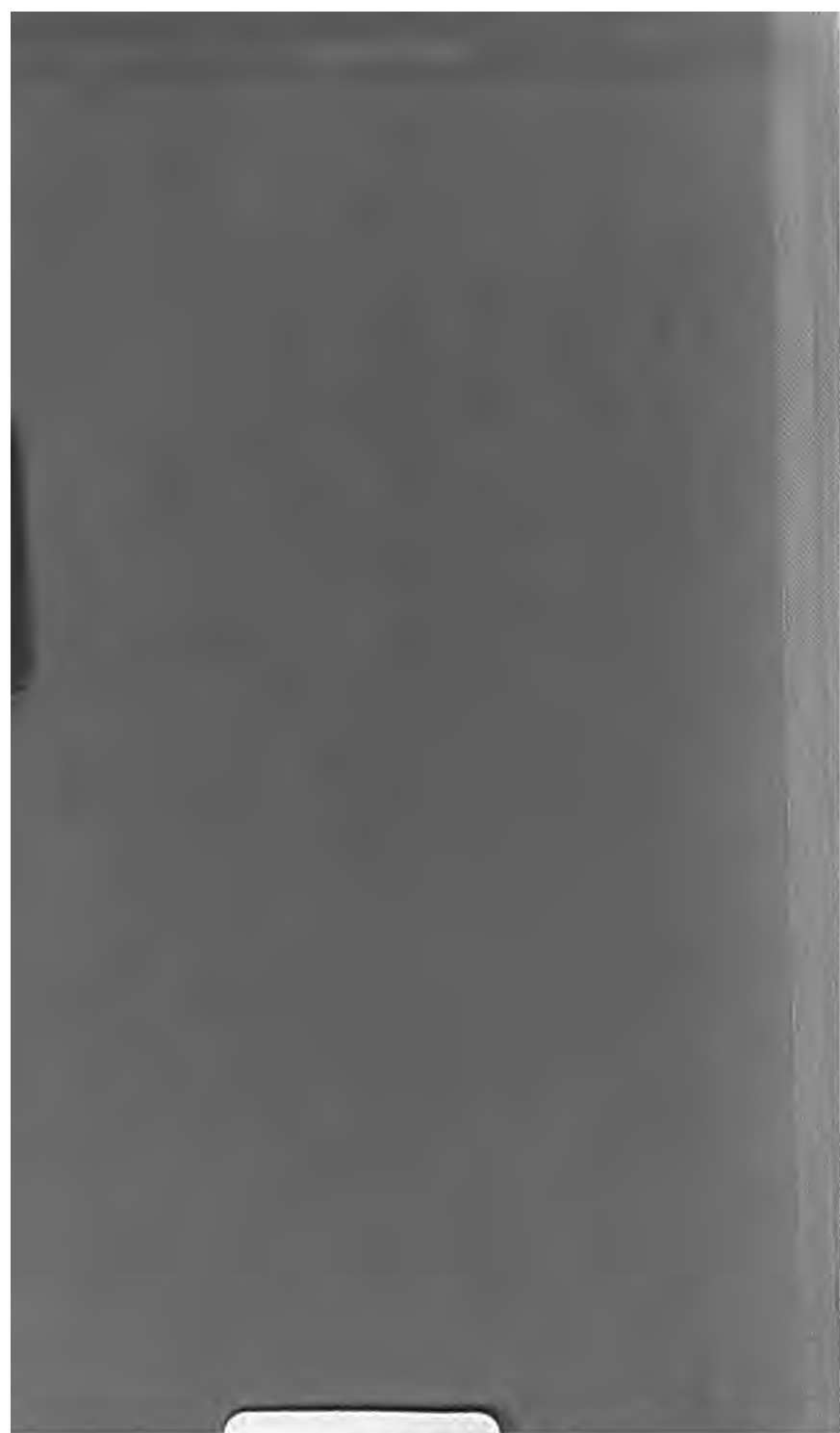
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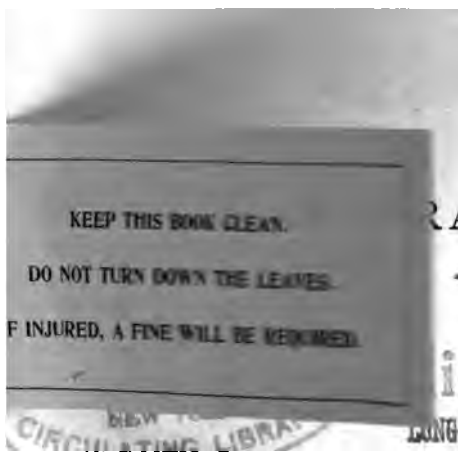


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A. Novel.



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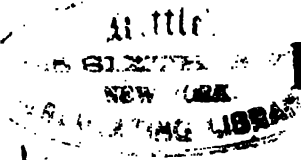
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EARL'S DENE.

FIRST PART—IN FRANCE.

Containing the Events of One Night.

I.

THERE is no better rule, in spite of the disregard that is usually paid to it, than that every book, of whatever kind it may be, should begin with a sentence or two to explain its motive, so that the intending reader may not be cheated into wasting his time, supposing the motive to be obviously worthless, in having to find out the worthlessness of it for himself; and not only so, but that the author himself may be kept from straying out of the straight road without good and sufficient reason. In accordance, then, with this most excellent principle, let it be clearly understood that the motive of this story is, so far as it professes to have any motive at all, the Power of Circumstance—that demon of demons which, whether for good or ill, the will of man may, indeed, call into life, but can seldom control and never wholly exorcise—and the way in which it entered into conflict with the wills, impulses, and characters of certain men and women who lived not very many years since, and of whom at least one or two were born not too long ago to be living still.

Before setting out, however, it is necessary, by way of introduction, to give some account of an occurrence that is rather of an exceptional kind in point of detail; and it is only right to say this before narrating it, in order to take the opportunity of warning the reader against thinking that the remainder of his journey will lead him among exceptional characters or exceptional scenes. Of the characters upon whose thoughts, feelings, and actions the plot of this story depends, there is not one that may not, in one form or another, fall within the range of a very limited experience. All will be seen striving to attain very much the same object, and, considering their dissimilarities of nature, in very much the same way; nor will the object or the way be of an essentially uncommon kind. Not one of the *dramatis personæ* will be found altogether bad or good, strong or weak; not one will have any pre-eminent claim to the title of hero or heroine, even in the technical sense of the words. Certainly not one will prove to be perfectly consistent—who, indeed, out of the world of fiction, ever does?—so that even the best will be best only by comparison, and the worst will not be without excuse. If, therefore, the intending

reader is unable to interest himself in men and women as they are or may be in the face of many faults and many weaknesses—if he demands exciting events and abnormal psychology—he must not complain that he has not been fairly warned when he finds himself disappointed; and, once more, he must not take what he finds in the introduction for an example of what he will find in the story itself.

It was, then, in the month of Nivose, in the year 1 of Liberty, and in the territory of the French Republic, that a certain circumstance took place which may fairly be taken as the beginning of an important chapter in the history of Earl's Dene, which itself belongs to a later time, and, as the title of it denotes, to another and nearer land.

Those who are versed in the revolutionary calendar will remember that in the month and year just named, what is called the Reign of Terror was at its height. Eighty persons a day were being guillotined at Paris; sixty were every day being shot, drowned, or guillotined at Lyons; sixty at Bordeaux; sixty at Marseilles; two hundred at Nantes; two hundred at Toulon. The King and Queen had already been followed up the steps of the scaffold by the best and by the worst of their judges. Massacre was running riot in La Vendée, while the fields and forests of the Vosges, of the Jura, and of the Gironde were swarming with miserable fugitives of all ranks and of all political creeds; for it was no longer nobles and Royalists alone who had special need to fear. In a word, it was just then that it seemed as though, throughout the whole land of France, there was no spot in which even a child might live in safety for a single day.

And yet here was at least one such spot. It was the village of St.-Felix-des-Rochers, in the department of Doubs.

St.-Felix-des-Rochers was small, obscure, not populous, and out of any beaten track. Yet it was not its obscurity that rendered it secure, for at that time seclusion by no means meant security. It was not its politics, even though St. Felix, like the greater part of the district in which it lay, was Republican to the backbone: for the guillotine had come to be even fonder of Republican than of Royalist necks. It was not that its inhabitants were so few: for it is among a crowd of strangers that safety is found, rather than

among a small circle of friends and neighbors. The real reasons were that there was not just then an able-bodied man in the place save the curé, who would not willingly have harmed a fly, and whom the women still worshipped, in spite of his never having, like their husbands and brothers, changed his opinions with the times; and that, at least in the winter time, no one in his senses ever dreamed of ever visiting the place except under compulsion; while no stranger ever had business that could possibly compel him to visit it at any season of the year. Nature had covered it with a friendly mantle of cold and snow, that had made the approaches to it difficult and dangerous. So much for the general causes of its security. But why this sanctuary of nature had been abandoned by the quiet race of herdsmen and wood-carvers, who had the best right to its protection, requires some explanation.

The lord of St. Felix, while places still had lords, had been the Marquis de Croisville, or Créville, as he was called by his vassals, to whom, however, he was little more than a myth, or a mere abstraction, of which his intendant was the not very agreeable embodiment. Before the year 1788, all that the present generation of the St. Feliciens had known of the present bearer of the title was, that he was a young man of about thirty years old, that he was much about the court, and that he had married a wife who was a stranger to the country. The curé knew a little more, however. About a year before the meeting of the states-general, the good father had, for the first and only time in his life, paid a visit to Paris, and he naturally made some inquiries as to what kind of person was the Marquis de Croisville. What he heard was not likely to please a parish priest of the old school. He heard the lord of St. Felix spoken of as a *bel esprit*, as no little of a *roué*, and, altogether, as a man of the time—as a “philosopher,” and as an enthusiast about the rights of man. But when, after much hesitation, he summoned up courage to call upon one whom his principles and his respect for the lord of the soil caused him to fear, he was no less charmed than surprised. He obtained an interview in order to request certain indulgences for his poor and struggling flock; and not only was he himself treated with the utmost courtesy and kindness, but he was enabled to carry back to St. Felix, together with a most glowing account of its master, such a harvest of material benefits, that love and reverence for the name of De Croisville became at once an active principle of faith in the place. The fact was, that it suited the marquis just then, as a man of the time and professed philosopher, to show an unusual amount of generosity to a set of people about whom in reality he did not care a straw, although they did happen to be his own. Consideration for the people was, though a little late in the day, in fashion at court just then, and no doubt his acts of munificence to his poor villagers somehow or other came to the ears of the king or queen. But of course the curé and his flock were able to look no farther than the deed itself.

Henceforth the existence of the marquis seemed to be much more of an actual fact to his people. They began to take an interest in every thing that concerned him, and eagerly opened their ears to catch up every floating rumor with

which his name chanced to be mingled. Nor was their feeling towards him of the nature of that gratitude which has been defined as a lively sense of favors to come; it partook of that, doubtless: but when those who have all their lives been obliged to look for favors to God alone find that they are not forgotten by man, after all, their feeling to their first human benefactor is something far more than one of ordinary gratitude. And rumors did come even to St. Felix sometimes. To what part of France, indeed, did they not come during those next two years? First they heard of the marquis as one of the most zealous defenders of the rights of the people even against his own order; and then all St. Felix became Girondist to a man, with the solitary exception of the curé, who still held by the old paths. And as he was as much beloved by his flock as a good and simple-hearted priest can be, the sympathies of the place came to be made up of a curious blending of Republican ideas with the most childlike religious faith. The curé must be right, and the seigneur could not be wrong; and so the parish made a compromise with itself. This, however illogical, was not difficult, for, in truth, the Girondism of the place was as much a matter of the heart, and as little a matter of the head, as its Catholicism. Then, not long afterwards, when the day of Mirabeau was over, the peasants heard of their lord as a friend of Vergniaud, and as one who had, of his own accord, thrown off the last vestiges of his rank; then they became almost Jacobin, but, nevertheless, they never gave up speaking of him as “the marquis.” Next they heard of him as voting for the death of the king; and still, though a shudder thrilled through the place, and though the curé was bold enough openly to speak out his abhorrence of the murder of the son of St. Louis, no one was a whit the less loyal to the name of the Marquis de Croisville. After that they heard of him no more, until one day sudden tidings reached them that he was not far from Pontarlier, in arms for the Gironde. The next day, not a man who could fight, save the curé, was left in St. Felix.

Though the place has been spoken of as a village, it in reality consisted, not of houses and cottages more or less closely packed together, but of some half a dozen outlying chalets, of which the church was the centre rather metaphorically than in fact. There was a chateau also, but it was in ruins, and had not been inhabited except by bats and owls since the days of Charles *le hardi*. It was in one of these chalets, which bore the not very appropriate name of Pré-aux-Fleurs, that father Laurent was sitting one night in this month of Nivose, in company with the old wife and with a young woman, one of her daughters. Of the appearance of the two latter nothing need be said: let it suffice that they were hard-working peasants in appearance as well as in fact. Of the priest may be said almost as little. He was an elderly, healthy-looking man, with a red weather-beaten face, of which the expression was that which belongs to a heart at peace with itself and all the world. That he could keep such an expression in those terrible days was in itself sufficient to vouch for the exceptional security of St. Felix-des-Roches. The room in which these three were sitting was large, and, though barely and roughly furnished, was rendered not uncom-

fortable by the presence of a blazing wood-fire, before which a large dog was basking in that delightful state of agony in which his kind revels when the fire is too hot and the night is too cold.

"No, you can not think of getting home to-night, father," said the old woman, who had gone to the window that she might look out into the still, cold air.

"You must not think of it, father," echoed the younger.

The priest drew closer over the fragrant wood-fire.

"But Dame Margot will be uneasy," he said, in the tone of one who thinks it is his duty to protest against doing what he fully means to do.

"Dame Margot will never expect you," replied the old woman. "There will be a snow-fall, and the wind is rising."

"In that case I suppose I must run the risk of giving Dame Margot a fright, then. Better that, perhaps, than to run the risk of giving her cause for it. I wish I could feel sure that your Pierre had as good quarters as these."

"And Monsieur le Marquis."

"And Monsieur le Marquis. Ah! these are terrible days—terrible days, Aunt Cathon. The world has gone mad, I fear."

"Ah! my father, you and I remember different times indeed."

"To have killed the king himself! No wonder God punishes this land. And I can not help fearing, Aunt Cathon, that we too shall have to suffer for that sin of our seigneur."

"Doubtless, my father, He will protect His own."

"No doubt, Aunt Cathon. We must put our trust in Him. How is the night now?"

"The snow is beginning. It is quite dark."

"Then I must stay, I suppose."

"Indeed you must, my father. The road will be lost."

"I wish I could send word to Dame Margot, though."

"But if she guesses where you are?"

"Well, I dare say she will. *Dieu!* now I think of it, this was the very day in the year I first saw the seigneur, just five years since. How times have changed!"

"You are fortunate, my father, to have seen Monsieur le Marquis with your own eyes."

"No," continued the priest, as if speaking to himself—"no, I can not think how a man like him should have been mixed up with such a sin—so noble, so generous as he seemed. I can not think he could have had a disloyal heart."

"Surely not, my father."

"And his young wife, too, poor girl! I trust she has come to no harm."

"She should have come to St. Felix, my father."

"Ay!—but I saw her too; and she did not look to be one who would fly to the hills while men remained in the field."

"Who knows? perhaps they will both come among us."

"Yes; we are safe from the bloodhounds here, thank God!"

"I will pray our blessed patron to put it into their hearts."

"I fear it is too late, Aunt Cathon. And then I fear, too, for our own people."

"They will be faithful to Monsieur le Marquis, my father."

"Ah! it is not that, Aunt Cathon. I feel like a shepherd whose flock has blindly run to give battle to a herd of wolves."

"God will protect His own."

"If they were truly on His side—yes! If they were gone to fight for Him!"

"But when they have gone to fight for Monsieur le Marquis, my father?"

"There is a higher loyalty, Aunt Cathon."

"What! than to fight for Monsieur le Marquis, who has been so good to us all?"

"Alas! I fear they know not what they do. When wolves fight with wolves it is no time for the sheep to leave their fold."

"But Monsieur le Marquis!" replied Aunt Cathon. The words seemed to express her whole idea of right and loyalty. The curé sighed, and was silent. He was not quite sure of his ground, and he felt that his last metaphor would not quite hold water.

"It is snowing fast," said the girl, after a pause. She had relieved her mother at the window.

"Truly our hills are a fortress to us," said the priest. "Who knows? perhaps at this moment our people are thanking God for this snow."

"Ah! snow or not, trust my Pierre for knowing his way among the hills."

"Yes indeed!" said her daughter, proudly.

"May it be so," said the priest. "At least I may pray for their safety, if for nothing more."

"And of Monsieur le Marquis."

"Ah! Aunt Cathon, it is fearfully hard to know what to think in these days. But doubtless, as you say, God will protect his own."

As Aunt Cathon took all that her priest said for gospel, she was a good deal puzzled by the subtle distinction between fighting for the right and fighting for Monsieur le Marquis, which, according to what he had said, it seemed to be her duty to draw. Nor was the curé himself by any means clear upon the matter. He could not deny to himself the principle of loyalty to the seigneur. It would have been all plain enough had he felt sure that the seigneur was on the right side; but the conflict of allegiance puzzled him terribly.

And now, having thus made the acquaintance of one who will play an important, though apparently obscure, part in this history—for its real importance is not diminished by the fact that the name of the curé of St. Felix will henceforth occur barely more than once again—it is time to leave the warm room and its fragrant blaze, and to turn out into the night, in order to become acquainted with certain persons whose parts, if not more really important, will be far less obscure.

II.

DURING this conversation and after it, a springless cart, drawn by a couple of rough-looking mules, was slowly travelling along a road which is remotely connected with the highway between Besançon and Lons-le-Saulnier.

The weather in that region of high hills, of which the loftiest point is Mount Jura, and on that night of January—or rather of Nivose, for the old two-faced god was far too unreasonable a being to be recognized by those who had

worshipped the very Goddess of Reason in person—was bitterly cold: too cold, indeed, for the heavy snow-clouds, from which large flakes were descending slowly, to come down bodily. If they had, the road would have been rendered simply impassable. The cart, which was of the rudest sort, was only dragged on by the mules with the greatest difficulty—a difficulty which was certainly not diminished by the fact that the direction in which it was going lay up-hill. The mules themselves were led by a peasant of the country, more rough-looking even than they who walked by their side, and occupied himself by talking to them from time to time in some unknown tongue, and looking about him at the thick gray clouds that hung everywhere around. Whatever might have been his appearance under ordinary circumstances, at present he certainly looked unpleasantly formidable. He carried a long knife without a sheath stuck through a sash which might or might not once have been of the orthodox tri-color; in spite of the cold, his feet were bare; his clothes were ragged, and of no particular description, so much had they lost all pretense to form; and, instead of a cap, he wore a linen bandage wrapped tightly over his forehead and completely covering one eye. Had the scene been in the Pyrenees instead of the Jura, he would have been taken for a *contrabandista* bearing off his cargo of salt or tobacco from a hardly-won battle with the *douane*. What the cart really contained could only be guessed at by an occasional movement among the cloaks and wrappings with which it seemed filled, and by an occasional moan of pain, as if some woman lay there whom the cold and the jolting of the clumsy conveyance caused to suffer terribly.

The scenery of the Jura on the western side, though often beautiful, seldom affords any thing like the grandeur that belongs to its eastern face; but winter aggrandizes all things, and now this pass which the travellers were ascending had become not only grand, but even terrible. In summer, no doubt, like a hundred other passes of the kind that run along the border of the Franche Comté, it led between hills covered from base to summit with green turf and waving woods, of which the monotony was only occasionally broken by some sudden mass of dark gray rock, beneath which the river leaped and sparkled like a mere silver thread. But in the depth of winter the whole scene is transformed, so that instead of being green and gray, the hills were now white with limitless snow and black with leafless trees; while under the massive sky the river no longer leaped and sparkled, but, fed by countless torrents, gloomily rushed along with a dull, ceaseless roar. He would be a bold man, even though well versed in the country, who should seek to guide himself or another through the hopeless sameness of those round, dome-shaped hills, undistinguished from one another by any of the sharp and varied outlines that among the Alps make every peak a landmark. Only one summit in the whole landscape stood for a sign, which, unlike the rest, was high enough to stand bald and bare out of the forest; and this in the darkness only looked like a vast cupola of cloud. The road itself, besides those caused by the snow, was not without other and more serious dangers, for it hung high above the river; and although the descent could not properly be called precipitous,

still it was quite far and steep enough to make a fall fatal, in one way or another.

The travellers proceeded for a long time without a word, unless one could call words the sounds addressed to the mules by their guide. At last, however, a man's voice cried out from the cart: "Pierre!"

"Monseigneur?" answered the leader of the mules, turning his head.

"Do not call me 'Monseigneur!' How far are we from Les Vacheries?"

"Six miles," and he stirred up the mules, who had taken advantage of this slight conversation to slacken their pace.

And now the hills grew darker, and the sky seemed to descend lower and lower until the great dome that lay to southward was completely absorbed in the mass of clouds. As for the course of the river, it had grown as black as if it were that of Styx or Acheron.

"Pierre!" again called out the voice from the cart.

"Monseigneur?"

"How often am I to tell you not to call me 'Monseigneur?' How long will it be before we reach Les Vacheries?"

The guide shrugged his shoulders; but the gesture, though significant, was not seen by monseigneur, who repeated his question.

"In less than three hours—if we get there to-night at all."

"But we *must* get there to-night."

"As monseigneur pleases." And again, after a long look at the sky behind him, he urged on the mules, who, considering the circumstances, certainly did their best. Probably they, too, wished to pass the night at Les Vacheries.

The flakes of snow, which had hitherto been fluttering through the air languidly and undecidedly, now began to increase both in size, in number, and in speed. They seemed to have been seized with a sudden purpose.

"Pierre!"

"Monseigneur?"

"Stop this horrible jolting. I am afraid madame is very ill."

The mules were brought to with what would have been a jerk had it not been for the slipperiness of the road, which nearly brought the leader to the ground, sure-footed as he was.

"Tell me, Pierre—when shall we really get to Les Vacheries? Are we certain to get there?"

The other no longer answered "as monseigneur pleases." "If it please God," he said instead.

"Can not we get on faster, at any rate?"

"Impossible, Monsieur le Marquis."

After some little difficulty, the heap of cloaks and straw was partially thrust aside, and a man emerged from the cart and stood by the side of Pierre. His costume was but little, if at all, better than that of his guide; but, even so, the distinction of his appearance was in keeping with what his voice had promised. He was as obviously a gentleman as Pierre was a peasant.

"Pierre," he said, in a low voice, "unless we can find help, madame will die. The cold, the fatigue, are too much for her strength, and she is in terrible pain, besides. You know this country—is there no house, no chalet, nearer than Les Vacheries? No cottage—"

"None that madame could reach. Les Vacheries is the nearest, by the road."

A cry came from the cart—the marquis ran to its side. "Good God!" he exclaimed, "my wife is actually dying. Let us push on, for Heaven's sake! I will walk by the cart; and push on faster, in Heaven's name!"

But this was by no means so easy. The snow, which had till now impeded their feet only, was now so thick as almost to blind the eyes both of mules and of men. The marquis carefully arranged the cloaks and straw, and then stood still in despair. Pierre said something to the animals, which seemed for a moment to encourage them to greater exertion. They almost plunged forward; but in a moment came to a stand, their feet and ears thrown forward, and their bodies strained back and trembling. A low, wild moaning was heard, far more terrible in its sound than that of the swollen river.

"What is that, Pierre?" asked the marquis, instinctively laying his hand on the pistols that he carried in his belt.

"That? That is the wolves, Monsieur le Marquis."

He shuddered. It was not many days since the wolves of the Gironde had saved Pétion from the guillotine: nor were those of the Jura, he thought, likely to be less merciful.

"Are they likely to attack us, Pierre?"

"I hope not, monseigneur." But his tone was not hopeful.

"Will not those accursed beasts stir?"

"They must stir, monseigneur, unless we make up our minds to wait till we have the snow for a blanket."

"Then push on once more."

Again the mules were urged into action—this time by means of something considerably stronger than mere words. But when they once stirred, it was not their fault that the progress which they succeeded in making was so slow; for they would willingly have galloped now if it had only been possible. As it was, however, the travellers had to creep along, the snow beating into their eyes, the cold numbing their limbs, and the howling of the wild beasts filling their ears with its wail of terror. But still, however slowly, they did make real progress. If the snow did not become so thick as to stop their passage altogether—if the wolves did not surround them—if their strength did not fail—if they did not perish with cold—they might reasonably expect to arrive at their destination in time to find shelter before it was too late. It is true that the chances were in favor of at least one of these things happening, but none of them might happen—and that was some comfort.

Suddenly, however, the mules stopped once more; and this time neither blows nor words would make them move. The marquis struck and threatened them; Pierre coaxed them; but they were deaf alike to threats and to flatteries, and callous to blows. At last, leaving them to themselves, and sheltering his eyes, or rather his one eye, from the snow with his hands, the latter went a few steps forward and looked carefully before him. Then, starting suddenly back and seizing the bridle, he forced the mules backward with all his force.

"Monsieur le Marquis," he said, "the will of God be done! We can not reach Les Vacheries."

"Not reach Les Vacheries?"

"Listen to that, monseigneur."

The marquis listened. "I hear the river," he said.

"It is not the river that you hear, monseigneur. The river does not sound like that."

And, in truth, the sharp, loud roar that seemed to thunder through their ears had but little in common with the dull rush of the river.

"What is it, then?"

"I know it well—it is the torrent of La Rochette."

"Are we not on the road, then? Have you lost your way?"

"We are on what *was* the road, monseigneur."

III.

THE situation of the travellers had now become more than critical. It was exceedingly perilous. The road having been swept away by the swollen mountain torrent, there seemed nothing to be done but to attempt to spend the night as they were. And how was it possible so to spend it with any reasonable chance of seeing the morning?

Both the nobleman and the peasant remained in silence for a while. At last the latter said,

"Monsieur le Marquis—"

"Well?"

"There is on the other side of this torrent a small chalet high up among the hills—on the side of that hill that you can just see from here. It is called Pré-aux-Fleurs."

"Yes—and there is also a chalet some miles beyond called Les Vacheries! It seems to me, since they are both on the other side of the torrent, that one is as near as the other."

"I was thinking, Monsieur le Marquis—"

"Well?"

"I believe I could reach it, monseigneur."

"Indeed! So be it, then. Save yourself. Better three perish than four."

"But, Monsieur le Marquis, if I can reach it, I can return. I know the people there, and I might get help. I should certainly find food."

"No, Pierre; you would only perish in the torrent."

"I think not, monseigneur. I have crossed La Rochette at this point for a less matter before I was married."

A sudden thought seemed to strike the marquis.

"You say you could go and return?" he said.

"Tell me—how should you reach Pré-aux-Fleurs?"

The other led him to the edge, soft, white, and treacherous, of the descent to the river, over which the torrent was rushing headlong. Then he guided him a few steps forward till the marquis felt the foam upon his face.

"Monseigneur will stand here," said Pierre, "and press his foot against this stump, which is firm. There he will hold a cord that I shall take from the cart. By this cord I can slip down to that slab of rock just below us, and which the spray has washed clear of snow."

"But you will still be on this side the torrent."

"True, monseigneur. But just where we stand the water falls down sheer to the river."

"I do not see how that can mend matters."

"Monseigneur will see. That slab of rock

which I pointed out to monseigneur projects sideways across the fall. Once upon it, I have simply to drop from its edge, and the fall is cleared."

"I see."

"It is not very far—the rope will be long enough for all. I shall land upon an easy slope, and shall then have nothing to do but to go up straight to *Pré-aux-Fleurs*."

"You know the way?"

"*Cré nom!* I should think so!"

"I will call out, and monseigneur will make a noose in the cord and fasten it over the stump."

"I see. In descending, the cord will be only of use to guide you and prevent your slipping?"

"That is all, monseigneur."

"And otherwise there is no danger?"

"It is not even difficult, monseigneur, for one who has done it before, and knows what to do."

"And how long shall you be gone?"

"If all is well, monseigneur will hear me call out in two hours."

"Two hours? *Mon Dieu!*"

"But, monseigneur—"

"Listen, Pierre. It is only too clear that in less than two hours madame will in all probability be beyond the reach of aid. You know how ill she is, and you hear that horrible howling, that comes every moment nearer. I, too, can not count upon two hours of life. But if you are right in what you say, you may yet save the child."

He did not wait for an answer, but went at once to the side of the cart and raised the coverings with which it was filled. Pierre stood irresolute; and no wonder—for he guessed what the marquis intended, and he was not eager for a responsibility that would add so much to the difficulty of the expedition that he had undertaken.

Under the heap of cloaks upon some straw lay a woman almost young enough to be called a girl, and, in spite of the wretchedness of her condition, still handsome, and even more than handsome. The form of her features was of that large and noble order that is superior to physical pain, however severe, and argued a strength of nature that must have struggled long before it could have been thus subdued. And now it was subdued, even to the point of unconsciousness. In only two ways did she show any signs of life—in the heavy and almost audible rise and fall of her bosom, and in the instinctive energy with which she pressed to it a young child of apparently not many weeks old, which seemed as little likely to last out the night as its mother.

After gazing upon the two for an instant, "It must be done," said the marquis to himself, decisively. "Take the rope, Pierre."

So saying, he, not without the exertion of some force, parted the child from what appeared to be the dying embrace of its mother. Then he spread a cloak upon the snow, laid the child upon it, and tied the corners firmly together crosswise; and then, having once more rearranged the coverings over the woman, he made his companion, who did not venture to object to the proceeding, pass his head and right arm through the spaces formed by the manner in which the corners of the cloak were tied, so that the living burden, falling behind him, was supported by his left shoulder, and left his arms free.

Pierre then grasping the rope in both hands in

the manner which he had explained, descended slowly backward to the narrow platform formed by the projecting piece of rock. The descent in itself was not more than moderately difficult; the only danger lay in the possibility of his feet suddenly slipping upon the snowy incline, and of the marquis having to let go his hold of the rope. Neither accident, however, happened: and he presently stood in safety upon the rock which, as he had said, projected across the course down which the torrent was rushing in a sheer and unbroken fall. It is true that this natural ledge did not afford him much standing-room, and the height between it and the bed of the river was enough to turn any ordinary head giddy; but Pierre was mountaineer enough to be free from that weakness at least, and to be able to prepare coolly and deliberately for the downward spring that was to land him beyond the torrent.

Had he been without the encumbrance at his back, the matter, though not without risk, would have been simple enough, for the distance he had to drop was not extreme. As it was, however, the danger and difficulty of the attempt were multiplied by ten at least. Nevertheless, the attempt must be made now; nor, indeed, did he think of giving it up. Calling out to the marquis to let out the rope to its fullest extent, he wound a part of it two or three times round his wrists, and then grasping it about a couple of feet from the end, made the leap, and fell safely upon the bed of new-fallen snow below him.

But a shudder passed through him when he rose and found himself free from the weight that had caused the whole of his danger. The corners of the bundle, necessarily ill-secured in spite of the care of the marquis, had come unfastened by the slight shock of the leap. But his fear was for a moment only, though it almost came back upon him when he saw how few inches lay between the child and the water-course—so few, indeed, that to recover it was by far the greatest risk that he had had to run.

But he did recover it, and, thanks to the soft bed on which it had fallen, he found it uninjured by the accident. Then he released his wrists from the rope, the end of which he fastened to a bush, shouted out to announce his safety and that of his charge, and then struck into a sort of path that crossed the road and led, by a long but easy ascent, to the hills.

On and on he went, while the cold wind whistled about his ears, carrying upon its breath many strange and distant sounds. But he felt no fear of imaginary dangers. A man into whose composition entered a single grain of fancy would have seen and heard all manner of terrible things when alone on a winter's night among the hills. But Pierre was on well-known ground, and he had not a grain of fancy about him. He realized that he was cold and that he was hungry, but nothing more; and he measured the condition, both mental and bodily, of those whom he had left by his own. He would not have minded spending the whole night out-of-doors as long as he had something to eat and drink; and as he doubted not the hospitality of *Pré-aux-Fleurs*, he doubted nothing. He even sang, not to scare away ghosts, but out of the genuine courage, or rather fearlessness, of his heart; for a heart can scarcely be called courageous that has no sense of fear. Nevertheless,

in spite of all this rough carelessness, the marquise herself could have found no want of tenderness in the way in which he carried her child.

Still, even to him, it was a welcome sight when he saw across an open space the flickering light in the window of Pré-aux-Fleurs. He stepped out faster, and in a few minutes more was knocking loudly upon the door with his fist.

The first sound he heard was the whining and scratching of the dog, as if it was striving to reach him through the door; then,

"Who is there?" cried out a sharp but timid voice from within.

"It is I, Aunt Cathon."

"*Mon Dieu!* It is Pierre!" and the door opened. Without another word he entered the room, the dog leaping about him in a state of frantic delight, and Aunt Cathon following in one of fear and anxiety.

"Ah, he is wounded!" she exclaimed, when he was fairly within the glow of the fire. The young woman started, gave a slight cry, and threw her arms round him, without observing the child.

"Is all over?" asked the priest, anxiously.

"And Monsieur le Marquis?" asked Aunt Cathon in the same breath.

"Monseigneur is on the other side of the torrent of La Rochette. It has broken through the road. Madame is with him. This is their child—down, Loup!—take the child, Susanne—and there they'll have to stay till to-morrow."

His words seemed to turn those who heard them into stone. Now, indeed, the end of all things must have come.

"You must get them something, Aunt Cathon," said Pierre, without giving them time to collect themselves. "I must go back to them at once."

Without a word the old woman ran off to find the best of what she had. The curé approached the child, at which Susanne was gazing with awe.

"Poor child!" he said. "And you crossed the torrent with this? Is it possible!"

Pierre nodded.

The priest looked at it more closely. Then he exclaimed,

"But it is dying! Take it, Susanne—take it in your arms. But I fear it is too late."

In truth, the infant seemed to have but little appearance of life. The young woman took it, and sat down with it in her lap before the fire, but the warmth had no effect. Then she stooped over it and raised it to her breast, but it still remained motionless. After all, it was almost a miracle that it had survived so long, for it seemed to be but weak and delicate by nature.

The curé watched her vain efforts to revive it in silence. At last, "I wonder whether it is baptized," he said, half to himself, half to Pierre.

The latter shook his head doubtfully.

"I doubt," the curé went on, in the same half-questioning tone, "if Monsieur le Marquis thought much of the blessed sacraments."

"I'm sure he didn't," said Pierre, decidedly.

"And Madame le Marquise?"

"I have heard say she is a heretic."

The curé crossed himself. "Poor little one! and I more than fear it has scarce an hour to live. And Monsieur le Marquis and madame—they too, perhaps, will not live through the night.

As to the child, my duty is clear. But—could I reach monseigneur, think you, Pierre?"

"Impossible, my father."

"But you will do it?"

"It will be as much as I can do."

"Are you sure I could not?"

"What! across the torrent?"

"You swear to me that it would be quite impossible?"

"I swear, Monsieur le Curé, that, if you tried, you would most surely find yourself in the river."

The priest did not look like one who was made to be an active martyr, although he would have suffered passively as bravely as any one. "If it is impossible, it is impossible," he sighed. "But at least the innocent child shall live, if not in this world, yet in the next. What is its name, Pierre?"

"I never heard it."

"And I do not know that of Monsieur le Marquis. Never mind—I will take it on myself, then." So saying, he dipped his finger into a basin of water, and, making on the child's forehead the sign of the cross, said,

"*Felix, si non es baptizatus, ego baptizo te in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, Amen.* The name is of good omen, and is that of our blessed patron. Yes, I have done what is right, even though the seigneur may blame me. I thank the *Seigneur des seigneurs* for having kept me here this night!"

Just then Aunt Cathon returned, bearing a basket which, from its size, proved that she had thought rather of the necessities of Monsieur le Marquis than of the arms of Pierre. But the strength of the latter was fully equal to the occasion.

"I shall return, Aunt Cathon," he said, "as soon as it is light. We shall have to contrive some way of bringing monseigneur and madame to Pré-aux-Fleurs. You had better send to Les Vacheries in the morning for help." He stooped over and kissed the cheek of Susanne, who was weeping silently over the child, and then once more stepped out into the night, followed by Loup, who seemed to prefer his master even to the fire.

IV.

So much, at present, for the brave mountaineer and his helpless charge. It is time to return to the more important persons who were waiting for their chance of safety.

The marquis, on hearing Pierre's parting shout, satisfied himself that the lady was as well protected from the cold night as circumstances would allow, gave a look to the mules, and then wearily seated himself by the road-side to wait in patience until the promised two hours should have dragged themselves away. Meanwhile the snow had ceased; the cry of the wolves had died away in the distance, and all was still, save for the roar of the water, which, however, like all continuous sounds, seemed to mingle with the silence rather than to destroy it. Little by little the gray mist cleared away, and brought into sight the winter moon that, small and pale, threw a wild light upon the snow, and upon the wet crag that overhung the torrent. Nature seemed to have sunk into repose again; and it was difficult for one who was utterly fatigued both in mind and body

not to sympathize with her repose. Besides, cold is in itself a soporific; and the marquis had scarcely slept for many nights and days.

Moonlight upon the snow! The very words are full of magic meaning, and the thing is magic itself. Transformation is the very secret of its influence. It does away with form and proportion; it reverses distances, making the near seem far, and the far near; it sheds upon all it touches colors, lights, and shadows unknown to reality; it rarefies air into mist, and all less substantial things into air. Nor are its changes confined to the material world alone. Our true lives become unreal, and our most passing fancies usurp the place of what is true. Vague and unfounded apprehensions, and still more vague and unfounded hopes, of which not one can be expressed in any tangible form, take the place of foresight and of memory. Not only so, but they cause us to fear where we have every reason to hope, and to be careless where we ought to fear. This is so even on a summer night; and winter and solitude together intensify the mysteries of the moonlight a hundredfold.

Thus the watcher in the snow could not be said to think while he waited. He dreamed; and the treacherous cold that wrapped him round caused his dreams more and more to resemble the dreams of actual sleep.

At last, indeed, he was no longer a watcher among the hills of the Jura. He was a wanderer in fairy-land, and in that most delusive region of the whole world of dreams in which the actors take the shapes of those whom we know in the real world.

Young in reality, he grew, as is almost invariably the case in dreams, much younger. The snowy ground on which he sat changed to a rich carpet; the hills, covered with the outskirts of the gray forest, approached one another until they formed the four walls of a room hung with warmly-colored pictures; the sky became a ceiling painted with gods and goddesses; the light of the pale moon brightened into the brilliancy of lamps; the rush of the torrent turned into a no less continuous flow of conversation, and the silent trees into a crowd that laughed and talked the language, not of trees, but of men and women of the world. It was as though some genii had transported him backward over space and time into the midst of some Parisian salon, of which the poor lady who seemed to be dying near him became once more the noblest ornament; for she, too, was touched by the same magic wand.

He was still near her—so near, indeed, that he felt the touch of her breath and of her hair. But he felt a cold weight at his heart that prevented him from uttering a word, and he knew that her heart was weighed down by the same heaviness. Presently, without regard to the company round them, by whom they were as little regarded, he took her by the hand, the warmth of which he felt with most undreamlike distinctness, and proceeded to lead her through endless passages and up and down countless stairs, some light and some dark, some crowded and some deserted, until they reached a room which was empty, gloomy, and cold. Here, still holding her by the hand, he again made an attempt to speak; but he could only think of absurd and meaningless words; and even these

he could not pronounce. And yet she seemed to understand them; for she said, in her own voice, and looking full into his face with her own eyes,

"And why should I? Have I not made up my mind?"

"*Arma virumque cano Troje qui primus*—"
Somehow he seemed to be growing younger still, and the room was surely that in which he had tried to construe Virgil twenty years since. He almost wondered that he had not recognized it before.

"Only let us go home," she said.

"Dearest Anne! Yes—the vacation will begin to-morrow. And you will come too?"

His whole life seemed to depend upon her not fading away just then. He put his left arm round her to detain her, still with his right hand holding hers, and she was just about to answer when the shout as of an angry mob filled his ears. Suddenly he let go her hand. He started, and for an instant looked heavily about him, and then tried to stretch his limbs, which were numbed with cold.

"Can I have been dreaming?" he said to himself. "A strange place to go to sleep in! But surely that sound I heard was no dream."

He listened, but all was still. But in another moment he heard below him the strong voice of Pierre, so pitched as to pierce through the roar of the water.

"Ah! it is Pierre returned—thank God!" and he called out in his turn.

And now to draw in and fix the rope. But, to his dismay, he found that the dream-genii had been treacherous indeed. The warm hand that he had dropped so suddenly when startled by the voice of Pierre, had in truth been nothing less than the very cord upon which in all probability depended the life of her who had filled his dreams. He sought for it carefully; but it was only too clear that the end of it which he ought to have guarded had slipped over the verge of the road.

"Pierre!" he shouted at the extreme pitch of his voice.

"Draw the rope, monsieur!"

"It has fallen over. What is to be done?"

"*Sacré nom de Dieu!*"

"What is to be done?"

"I have this end of it. Monsieur must come down to the rock. Perhaps I can throw it to him there."

This was easier said than done. The marquis had not the sure feet of Pierre; and even the latter could not have descended in perfect safety without some guidance.

It must be done, however. Carefully noting the position of the slab of wet rock with his eye, he lost no time in sliding, as gently and as slowly as he could, down the face of the hill until his feet were stopped by the stone. Then, kneeling down, he saw Pierre standing just below him. His position was any thing but pleasant; for the single glance that he ventured to cast down the front of the hill made him turn almost giddy, and the water that thundered under his feet made the ledge on which he was supported shake and tremble, while his face was dashed by its foam.

"Is the child safe?" he asked at once, and anxiously.

"Quite safe, Monsieur le Marquis. I have

drawn up the cord, and will throw one end to you there. But do not move, except to catch it."

After a few unsuccessful attempts it was caught.

"And now?" asked the marquis.

"Monseigneur will find it difficult to climb back without help. I must get on to the rock. It is very unlucky that monseigneur let go the rope."

"And how will you get on to it? And there is barely room for two."

Pierre considered for a moment. "It was very unlucky," he repeated. "Would monseigneur perhaps try to climb back? It would be the best way, if he could manage it."

"I will try."

"Monseigneur must be careful. He had better keep his eyes on the stump, and never look downward."

"And then?"

"Monseigneur will fasten the noose to the stump. I can climb up then."

Fastening the cord round his body, that it might not slip out of his hands again, the Marquis de Croisville attempted, with his numbed limbs and reeling sight, to breast the steep bank of snow. But the attempt was hopeless, and he had to give it up in despair.

"Pierre," he called out, "I can not climb three steps."

The other was silent for a while. Then he said,

"Then let monseigneur make all the room he can."

The marquis crouched down against the snow-bank. Pierre, putting his whole strength into the spring, leaped upward; and, by an effort of immense activity, succeeded in reaching with his hands the rough edge of the stone, to which he proceeded to draw up his body. It was a perilous position; but, for so good a mountaineer, apparently far from desperate.

Only apparently, however. It was too true that the stone was only made for one, though not in the sense intended by the marquis. The frosts and thaws of a thousand winters had done their work upon it; and though it had room, it had not strength for two.

With a thundering sound, and with one wild cry, the rock and the two victims of a dream fell together headlong down the steep, straight course of the torrent. There is no need to trace the fall of that confused mass of broken rock and shattered limbs; for it would be absurd to suppose that any creature could make that descent and remain for a single instant alive.

V.

WHATEVER comes with the night, no matter how real and vivid it may be, is always of the nature of a dream; while, on the other hand, the most dim and dream-like of mornings always brings with it a sensation of reality. Not only is this the case with man, but with nature also: and now, when morning came, the hills seemed literally to wake, even although the light of the moon had been brighter and more distinct than that of the winter daybreak. Dull as daylight may be, it is at all events preferable to the excitements of nightmare. The very torrent, as it

foamed over the road, and reflected the red globe of the sun, seemed to have forgotten the mischief that it had brought about; for the departure of the night had deprived it of at least half its grandeur and nearly all its terror.

Nevertheless the fact remained that the number of strong men in the world was less by two—not that that can be considered much, perhaps, when every day strong men as well as weak were being forced out of the world by hundreds. As to the marquise, it may seem incredible, or almost incredible, that she should have survived the cold, the weariness, and the pain in which she lay. But experience proves that it is by no means incredible. There are some constitutions that may seem to be utterly broken, and yet remain proof against death—that can not die, in fact, except from old age. And it is just among delicate women that this intense vital force is generally most strongly developed. In narratives of shipwreck and famine we invariably find that it is tenderly-nurtured women who prove most superior to hardship. Whether it is that delicacy and strength of organization are identical; whether it is that women who habitually expend little muscular exertion acquire thereby a larger reserve fund of passing strength; or whether it is that their frames are by nature better adapted for mere endurance than those of men, the fact that seemingly weak women do often live through what would almost to a certainty kill the strongest man, can not be doubted; and it is a strong illustration of any one of these theories that, during the past night, the Marquise de Croisville did not die.

About sunrise her trance changed into a natural sleep, which, had it come upon her during the cold of night, must have inevitably caused her death in spite of her possessing any amount of vital force. After an hour or two she woke, and managed partially to raise herself from her bed of cloaks and straw.

She found herself alone, in a white waste of silence: for to the sound of the water her ears had accustomed themselves unconsciously. It was long before she could collect her thoughts; long, even, before she felt about her for her child; longer still before she could realize the fact that it was gone from her.

But she did realize it at last: and then the rush of returning consciousness brought with it a new strength that was almost unnatural. She rose almost completely; she strove to call out her husband's name. But in spite of what might almost be called the madness of her fearful anxiety, she could only fall back once more, and her attempt to speak only ended in a cry of anguish. She stretched out her arms to grasp the air; then she listened with an intentness that would have caught the faintest and most distant sound, had there been any distant sound to hear; and then God knows into what a state of utter terror, of utter desolation, of utter helplessness she fell—unable to move, unable to think, unable even to moan. That madness itself did not come to her relief is almost a miracle. Perhaps it was the weakness of her body that saved her: it must certainly have been to a great extent the strength of her mind. What she felt can not be called mental anguish, for she was without any conscious impression of any thing. The mere fact that she still lived was all that she knew.

and that was more than enough. No anguish, however bitter, was needed to add to the intense bitterness of each moment of mere life.

How long she lay in this condition can not be told. To her it seemed as though she lingered through centuries; but then many centuries of life may be contained in a single moment of time. It could not have been really long, or there would have been some attempt at communication from Pré-aux-Flours. At last, however, her strained ears did catch a sound. It was that of two voices approaching along the road towards her, and on the same side of the torrent.

"Are you sure we are on the road, Jules?" asked one.

"Sure" is a strong word. I'm never sure of any thing. *Diable!* how cold I am!"

"Cold? I swear to you that if we do not reach somewhere in half an hour you will have to leave me on the road. My feet are ice."

"Take some brandy. Who can tell where he is among these cursed hills? But this was said to lead to St. Felix."

"St. *Ignis fatuus*, I should think. What a noise of water!"

"Only the river, I suppose. What a night we have passed! I only hope that there may turn out to be a hell, after all."

"Why so?"

"Because we shall have had our turn, and some people will be pretty sure to have theirs."

"They say the worst parts of hell are its cold corners."

"I should think so. I would be put on a spit with pleasure just now."

"And I would eat you with pleasure before you were half done. But, talking of hell, what in the devil's name have we here?"

The other shrugged his shoulders. A woman! poor wretch! She has escaped *la sainte mère*, any way." This, it may be supposed, was his euphemism for the guillotine.

"But she may be alive."

"Impossible. But, praise be to Death! he has sent us a cart and a pair of mules. We will send the corpse rolling down the hill and take possession. My faith! Carrier would have sent the citoyenne down alive."

"But, Jules, had we not better see—"

"See nothing, my friend; that is the wisest way."

The other, who had gone a few steps in advance, made a sudden exclamation which brought his companion to his side.

They looked at the torrent, and then at each other, in blank despair. At last said he who had been called Jules, and who had proposed to deal so summarily with the marquise,

"Then there is an end of us, *mon ami*," and he smiled in a way that made him by no means pleasant to look on. Indeed, in other respects the two companions were sufficiently unattractive, and yet they were even still more pitiable. Their accent and their language were good, and were not even provincial; but they were barely covered with wet and filthy rags, their faces were grimed with dirt and black stubble, and they seemed as though brandy had been meat and drink to them for days. They also were doubtless victims of the time.

"An end of the road, you mean," answered the other, whose fainting energy seemed to be re-

vived by the extremity of their situation. "Here is this cart, as you say. It is clear that the citoyenne is in much the same boat as we are—and," he added, going to the side of the cart, "not unlike an aristocrat. Poor girl!"—and he looked at her again—"she has not long to live, I should say. Hand the brandy. See, she opens her eyes. Are they not fine ones, too?"

"What are you saying about fine eyes?"

"Oh, I was thinking that we might drive a better bargain than if we threw away our goods—that's all."

"You speak in riddles."

"Not at all. Look here, Jules. Let us ride back the way we came. When we reach the three roads, let us take that which leads to Besançon—that is all. No one knows us there, and no one will care to ask us questions if we bring so fair a postulant to the altar of the *sainte mère*. And if they choose to trim our beards as well—why, I don't see that we shall lose much. We shall never get alive out of these accursed hills."

The poor marquise at last found her voice.

"Take me where you please," she said, feebly; "I am ready."

"Hm! a foreigner! Are you alone, citoyenne?"

She considered what she should reply. Suppose that her husband and her child had left her to seek aid and shelter! Suppose that in fact they had found it? It would never do to run the risk of letting these men, plainly rendered desperate by danger and misery, know any thing about them. Besides, what did it matter how she died? In any case she expected to die in a few hours at most, and her reason told her that to insure their safety it would be fully worth her while to forfeit her chance of having a last but useless interview with them. But just as she was on the point of saying "Quite alone," a large dog scrambled over the side of the road, bearing in his mouth a handkerchief of fine cambric.

One of the two men showed it to her, while the dog tried to draw the other to the edge of the water-course. She saw that it was her husband's; and when he who had followed the dog said, "Ah, it is plain that the citoyenne is alone if her friends tried to break their necks by getting round here," it was clear enough to her what the fate of her husband and of her child must have been.

"What is your name, citoyenne?" asked Jules, who held the handkerchief.

"The Marquise de Croisville."

The two men exchanged meaning looks.

"You are not French?"

"I am English."

"*Que diable allait-elle faire dans cette galère?*" Well, there is no help for it. Turn the mules round, if their knees are not as stiff as mine. There, citoyenne, we'll make you as comfortable as we can. Who knows? Perhaps we are all going to visit *la mère guillotine* together. Well, death is but death, after all; and whether it comes by the knife or the cold, what matter? Courage, citoyenne! Who knows what may happen?" And with a sort of reckless gayety he began to sing—

"Ca ira, ça ira,
Les aristocrates à la lanterne!"

"Hush!" said the other, who, though he had proposed the scheme, was less brutal in manner.

"Not I," replied Jules, dragging round the mules with a will, and with no sparing of blows; "we must learn to be good Montagnards—curse them! One must try to live, after all. And if we have to die with the citoyenne, we will give them in their teeth the good old Marseillaise."

A sudden light came into the pale face of the marquise. Tears for the first time flooded her eyes, and, after one glance at the torrent which now lay behind her, she looked up to heaven.

"I am justly punished," she murmured to herself in English. Then, once more in French, she said in a strong full voice that seemed to tell of conquest over self, "And if I have to die, with you or without you, my last words shall be *Vive le Roi!*"

But it was a last effort, and she fell back exhausted. The two men shrugged their shoulders at one another, and the cart once more went on in silence.

SECOND PART—IN ENGLAND.

Containing the Events of Twenty-two Years.

I.

THE reader has now made the acquaintance of at least one of the *dramatis personæ* of this history. It is the object of the second part of the Introduction to make him more or less acquainted with most of the others, and also, to some extent, with a certain English town with which they had much to do.

This town is called Denethorp, and is one of a numerous class of places that have been ruined by railways. Once upon a time it was not a mere country town like any other country town. As far back as the reign of Elizabeth it had been famous for its manufacture of woollen fabrics, and its weavers and clothiers formed a privileged class, and were a real power in the land. The curious may still see in the office of its clerk of the peace two or three charters, of various degrees of antiquity, conferring upon the place various strange, valueless, and impolitic rights and immunities. For a long time its prosperity continued. Machines became invented and improved; and one of the most celebrated inventors and improvers was a Denethorp man. Then the place improved also. Mills began to be built on every side; new settlers came from a distance; and, what with strikes and machine-breaking, the recorder of the day began to find his hands quite full. But when machinery began to be applied to locomotion, and when the country began to find out that the goods which formed the staple of the place were more easily and cheaply obtained from the north than from the south-west, the prosperity of the place simply collapsed, never to be restored. It is difficult now to see what use is fulfilled by its existence, except to provide the neighboring parishes with a market for the purpose of selling corn by sample.

It was here, then, in this little town, that in the days of its modest prosperity, and before those of its vain ambition, "the doctor," as he was called by neighbors, or Mr. Warden as they should have called him, was sitting with his young wife in the parlor of his newly-furnished brick house that stood in the outskirts of the town, and that had a sort of prescriptive right to be the house of the doctor for the time being. He was a young man who had not long since come from Redchester, and had paid money for his practice in Denethorp. It was upon the strength of that practice that he had taken a wife.

Young as he was—he could not well be more than thirty—the most unskilled observer could not have taken him for any thing but a country doctor of a well-known but not of the highest type. He was tall and robust, but inclined to fatness, with a red full face that told of much exposure to wind and weather, and with a little of that undefinable look about him that belongs to a man who spends a great deal of his time on horseback as part of his regular day's work. His hands were large and red, but well trimmed and cared for; and his expression—which was by nature that of a good-humored, easy-going fellow, who would complacently take the good and ill of life, whichever might happen to turn up, without making any particular effort to secure the one or to avoid the other—had already acquired something of that unmistakable sort of artificial gravity that is peculiar to and inseparable from the profession of medicine. Women of his own rank of life, which was obviously not very high, who regarded only his number of inches, his curling brown hair, his blue eyes, his white teeth, and his round and jolly voice, were unanimous in thinking the new doctor a handsome man: and, doubtless, his plain, quiet-looking wife, the daughter of a druggist in Redchester, had been of that opinion also. With the men of the place, too, he got on famously. They set him down as a good fellow, and considered him an acquisition to the club of tradesmen that met nightly behind the bar of the King's Head. Thus, what with his personal and social advantages, his youth did not tell much against his professional prospects. Indeed, for that matter, when he first came to Denethorp its inhabitants had to exercise Hobson's choice in the selection of their physician. Patients had either to go to "the doctor," or else to doctor themselves: and it soon became an understood thing that people must avoid being taken suddenly ill when the hounds met within the reach of a man who kept but one horse.

On the whole, it was thought by her friends that Mrs. Warden had done very well indeed for herself and her family in marrying the doctor at Denethorp. It is true that when she and her husband had become well settled down, she found that she had to spend a good many solitary hours; but that she took as a matter of course. To spend his evenings among his acquaintances, settling the affairs of the world, the nation, and the town, until he had drunk more punch than was

quite good for him, was, according to her experience, only a necessary phenomenon of the masculine nature. Her father had always done the same; so had her brothers; so had every tradesman and professional man in her native place; and, had her experience been very much ~~wider~~ than it was, she would have found much the same state of things everywhere throughout the kingdom. It was, at all events, a symptom of the time, of which she never complained or dreamed of complaining.

But on this particular evening it was far too cold to tempt the doctor to turn out unnecessarily, even to go as far as the King's Head. So he contented himself with drawing his chair well in to the fire, placing his big feet on the brightly-polished fender, mixing himself a stiff tumbler of hot grog, filling his long clay pipe, and so preparing to enjoy a domestic evening with his wife, who was devoting to needle-work all the attention that she could spare from the baby.

It must not, however, be supposed that the hour was by any means late. The doctor used to begin his evening as soon as he had dined, supposing that his patients had not kept him from home; and the church clock had struck no more than four when he took the first sip from his glass. By the time that he had taken a second, a horn was heard, of which the well-known sound announced the arrival of the coach from Redchester.

"Poor devils of outsiders!" said the doctor. "They must be frozen to each other's sides. Well, thank the Lord, I'm not likely to be wanted to-night."

"How is Anne Webb, Jack?"

"Oh, she can't be so unmerciful as to be confined on such a night—except to the house;" and he laughed at his own joke. "Not bad that; eh, Lorry?"

Mrs. Warden smiled, but merely out of sympathy; for any thing like a joke was altogether beyond her.

"I say, Lorry," he said after a pause of some ten minutes, "this frost is a confounded shame. I meant to have had at least two days. But that's always the way when the meet's hard by, and one has just a bit of spare time."

Just then the clock struck the quarter; and as this is the whole of the conversation that passed between them in the space of fifteen minutes, it may be fairly assumed that the doctor belonged to that numerous class who are by no means so sociable at home as they are when abroad.

But he was not fated to lose his evening's gossip, after all. The clock had not had time to chime another quarter when a knock at the door announced the arrival, cold as the evening was, of a young man of about the same age as the doctor, but of a smarter and sharper appearance.

"Why, White, my boy!—well, I do call this friendly. Hope nothing's the matter, though?"

"Nothing but cold, and that you can set right for me without going to the surgery. How snug you are in here! Have you any sisters, Mrs. Warden? Because then—"

Mrs. Warden smiled pleasantly.

"Have you looked in at the Head, White?" asked her husband.

"For a minute; but it was dull as ditch-water. There were only Willet, you know, and old Smith; and I couldn't stand that, of course. So

as I knew my fire would be out, I came on to yours."

"Make yourself comfortable, then."

"I will. What's the news?"

"Oh, there's a good crop of rheumatism just now, and that sort of thing. But, between you and I, the place is a bit of a sell."

"Why so?"

"One can't make much out of rheumatism. What I like are patients with gout, my boy; they're the sort to pay."

"I see."

"We're not like you lawyers; we can't make patients if they're not ready made."

"I don't know about that."

"Well, anyhow, it's a poor sort of place, only to have one good family within a dozen miles."

"The Raymonds? But then they're a dozen in themselves."

"Poor little things!" said Mrs. Warden compassionately.

"Yes, they take a lot of physic; but then they give one a lot of trouble. Mrs. Raymond seems to think one has nothing to do but run after her children if one of their little fingers aches. And what's the news with you?"

"With me? oh, nothing. But there's some news of one of our clients that'll interest you—and you too, Mrs. Warden."

"And what's that?"

"Old Clare's coming back."

"What!—to Earl's Dene?"

"Yes—and Miss with him."

"Then there'll be some fine doings this winter, I suppose?"

"Hm! The old gentleman's coming to be quiet, he says: and Miss must have changed from what she was if we get any fine doings out of her."

"What was she, then?"

"She wasn't down here much, you know. But she was very odd—damned odd, in fact; and I don't think she and the old gentleman used to pull too well together."

"Will of her own, eh?"

"And a very queer will too. I don't believe she ever danced since she was born."

"Methodistical?"

"Proud, I should say."

"Pretty?"

"So-so. But I don't care much for that style. I think a pretty woman's one that'll let you kiss her—ha, ha, ha!"

"For shame, Mr. White!" said Mrs. Warden.

"Why, there were a lot of fellows mad about her, I know, and she'd never speak to one of 'em. And well they might be, for I don't mind saying that I'd give a round plum for her myself if I had it, and be a good many pennies the richer."

"Perhaps she did her flirting up in town?"

"She was queerer up there than down here."

"What did she do there, then?"

"I have to see the old gentleman sometimes, you know, up in London; so I've met her at dinner. I sat next a bishop once, at the last election-time. I wonder who'll stand for the county now?"

"And Miss Clare?"

"Miss Anne? She talked—didn't she talk! The bishop was scared out of his seven senses, and the old gentleman got to look like a lobster—and no wonder."

"And what did she talk about?"

"Lord knows what she didn't! But she made out every thing to be shams—Crown, and Lords, and Parliament, and law, and all: and as to the Constitution—damme, I can't say what she didn't say; I know she made me stare."

"But that was treason!" said the doctor.

"And blasphemy!" said his wife.

"If I'd been her father, I'd have whipped her and packed her off to bed. I expect that's why he sent her abroad."

"Why, the devil must be in the girl," said the doctor. "I must get up diseases of the brain before they come home, and lay in a stock of strait-waistcoats. We are to have nice neighbors, it seems."

"It must be a great trial for the poor old gentleman," said the lawyer; "and he member for the county, and a good Tory, and all. You'll have two good patients, I expect, in a day or two."

"How long has she been abroad?"

"Oh, it's some years now. It was just before those damned Frenchmen began to play their pranks."

"Began to? As if one didn't know what the French were, ever since—ever since one was born. A cowardly pack of vermin! I wish I had the doctoring of a few."

"Oh, John!" said Mrs. Warden.

"I do, though. I know what dose I'd give a Frenchman. He wouldn't care to try it twice, I fancy. Ha, ha, ha!"

"What'd you give him?" asked the lawyer.

"Something that'd soon make him bring up his frogs, anyhow."

"I thought you meant you'd treat him surgically."

"So I would, too. I'd cut his frog-swallowing throat, and hang him up by his own wooden heels; and that's surgical enough, I think."

Mr. Warden was certainly beginning to get comfortable. Indeed he was getting remarkably so, when a neat-looking servant-girl entered the room with the unwelcome news—does it not always happen so?—that the doctor was wanted.

His first words on being disturbed were about as complimentary to his patients in general as his last had been to the French nation; his next were a distinct refusal to turn out, even if the message had come from Earl's Dene itself—which was not likely, seeing that Mr. Clare was in London, and Miss Clare abroad.

"But hadn't you better see who it is, John?" asked his wife, quietly.

"And who the devil is it?"

"'Tis Dick, hostler from the Head, sir. A lady's been took bad in the coach."

"Confound her! Couldn't she wait till she got to Sturfield? Well, if I must I must, I suppose. Where is she? At the Head? I dare say it's nothing."

With his wife's aid he wrapped himself up, and then, having primed himself with another stiff half-tumbler, he set off towards the marketplace, accompanied by the messenger.

"What is it, do you know, Dick?"

"Not I, doctor, nor nobody. Lady's got a genelman as is from foreign parts, belike. Leastwise none on us can't make 'em out, not none; not even missus."

"Then, Dick, if the missus can't, nobody can."

"Right for you, doctor. She be a sharp un."

The King's Head was in a state of extraordinary commotion, which hardly calmed down even upon the arrival of the doctor. The ordinary bustle consequent upon the change of horses was over; but the landlord was staring and whistling in a bewildered way, the chambermaid was running wildly, and without an object, up and down stairs, and the sharp mistress was scolding every body impartially, and without reason. One or two *habitués* of the parlor, whom no weather had been known to keep away for twenty years, were both talking at once and giving all sorts of contradictory advice, to which no one listened.

The doctor himself was seized upon by the landlady, who at once led him to an up-stairs bedroom.

He saw a woman lying upon the bed, a man, whom he guessed to be her husband, standing by her side in a state of helpless distress, and a little girl of some three or four years of age crying in a corner. On addressing the man, he found him to be a Frenchman; but as neither could speak a word of the other's language, the discovery was not of much use. Turning, therefore, his attention to the woman, he saw that she was in a raging fever that would in all probability confine her to her bed for many weeks to come, even if it ever allowed her to leave it alive.

Having done what he could under the circumstances—given the landlady such directions as he thought necessary, told her not to be alarmed about the expense for a day or two, and had another glass of grog at the bar—he went straight home, and, as he always did under circumstances that at all ran out of the usual groove, consulted his wife. She, as she was apt to do, said little, but did the wisest thing that could be done. She made her husband go to bed, went to bed herself, called at the King's Head early the next morning, and then, without delay, went to see Mrs. Raymond, of New Court.

II.

THERE have been so many good women in the world—for every body knows or has known one, and most people know or have known more than one—that it would be unfair and invidious to say of any one woman that she was the best who ever lived. Nevertheless, had all Denethorp and all its neighborhood been polled on the subject, it would have given an unhesitating and unanimous vote for this Mrs. Raymond. She more than supplied the want of a resident family at Earl's Dene; and if New Court had but little political influence, it had all the love and affection that Earl's Dene wanted. If she had lived beyond middle age, it may safely be said that none of the complications of this history would ever have been brought about; for nothing with which she had to do was ever known to go wrong. As for her husband, he was any thing but a nonentity; he was a most admirable country gentleman—and than that what higher praise can be bestowed?—but he believed in his wife as much as the rest of their world, or even more, if that had been possible. There are some women whose husbands at their death have nothing left but to sit down and die for company; and Mrs. Raymond of New Court was one of these women.

This excellent lady lost no time in becoming acquainted with the unfortunate strangers, whom she found out to be French refugees trying to make their way to London; not because they had friends or prospects there, but just because they knew not where else to go. The child, she learned also, was not a daughter, but an orphan niece of madame. As much through her care and kindness as through any skill of his, the doctor's patient recovered; and there would have been no difficulty about his bill even had he made any. And then it ended in Monsieur and Madame Lefort establishing themselves in Denethorp for good and all. They could teach a great many things between them; and so they joined that large army of emigrant teachers with whom those of us who can date back the days of their instruction to the beginning of the century have so many recollections, half ludicrous, half pathetic.

At first, of course, Denethorp did not afford these two very much opening, and they had to thank their patroness for tiding them over a great many early difficulties. In acting thus towards them, the lady of New Court was no doubt mainly moved by the generosity of her heart; but she had another motive. Her little girl, her only surviving child—for, as a mother, she had been as unfortunate as she had deserved to be the reverse—was within a year or two of needing teachers, and the mother could not but feel what an admirable thing it would be to have two persons close at hand who would save her from being obliged to send her child away too soon. In a few years, too, the new prosperity of the town created a class of mill-owners' daughters with an ambition of becoming fine ladies, and a girl-school sprang up in the place which was patronized by many Redchester people; so that ere long the position of the foreigners considerably improved.

They were both young at the time of their arrival; and not very long after it Madame Lefort bore her husband a daughter, who was christened Marie. About ten years afterwards she gave her husband a second family, as it were, in the persons of a boy and a girl—in giving birth to the latter of whom she, after having been in chronic ill health for some years past, died.

Death, indeed, had been busy at Denethorp just then, and had carried away at least three of those who have been mentioned in this chapter—mentioned, apparently, only that they might immediately disappear.

Not only had Madame Lefort left her husband with a young family upon his hands, but her friend Mrs. Warden and her patroness Mrs. Raymond were also no more; and Alice Raymond, the young heiress of New Court, was soon left not only motherless, but fatherless also.

The latter, when Europe was once more at peace, was sent by her guardians to finish her education abroad, and, at her own request, was allowed to take with her the niece of Madame Lefort, who had always been a pet at New Court, and had to a very great extent been a sharer in the lessons and games of its heiress. Alice managed this arrangement quite as much for the sake of her own pleasure and comfort as in order to keep up her mother's kindness to the family; indeed, her affection for her playmate was that of a sister. And so now she carried her off

to Paris as her companion, both in name and in fact.

Marie, however, had never been so fortunate as to have had much share in her cousin's advantages. While the two were yet mere children, and the latter was spending half her time at New Court, she was left pretty much to the companionship of the doctor's two children. The elder girl was clever, pretty, and interesting: Marie was plain, not clever, and decidedly uninteresting. She was so quiet, so shy, and, in consequence, so awkward, that she was worse than unnoticeable; and as every body told her how stupid she was, she naturally came at last to deserve the reproach to some extent. In truth, she was not so much stupid as slow; but as the difference between slowness and stupidity is almost always imperceptible, it is no wonder that those about her did not perceive it. Such merits as she had were negative, and were such as by their very nature draw no attention, and interest no one. Two of these were merits, however, that, uninteresting and unobtrusive as they are, must be allowed to compensate for a want of those brilliant qualities with which they are so seldom combined: she had the sweetest temper in the world, and she was wholly free from the slightest taint of jealousy. She was no more jealous of the affection that every one showered upon her cousin, and gave to her so very sparingly, than the moon is jealous of the sun. She was indeed herself her cousin's warmest and devoted admirer; and the more her heroine was admired the more she herself was pleased.

As these two grew up, the difference between them widened and widened, even when approaching womanhood made Marie less absurdly shy and much less plain. Indeed, in point of looks, she became even good-looking enough to be spoken of by strangers, if they noticed her at all and her cousin was not by, as a rather pretty girl. But no one had ever said so to her face, nor was she very likely to meet with any one who would. If any such remark had been made in the hearing of any of her friends who had known her from her infancy, one and all would have stared amazed, and she would have stared the most of all. And so, when her divine cousin went away with her grand friend, Marie was quite content to stay at home with her father, and her little brother and sister—to find all her serious occupation in mending, washing, and such like pursuits—and to look for her whole amusement in strumming on the old harpsichord, and in taking gossiping walks with Laura Warden, the doctor's daughter, who, poor girl, was plain, stupid, and uninteresting in an absolute and positive sense. It was this Laura Warden who, with her brother Mark, had been Marie's early and only playmates. Hers was indeed a dull, poor, stupid life; it scarcely contained sufficient material to feed even a quiet spirit that dreamed of nothing more.

In the course of one of these walks of theirs, the two girls, having been as far as the lodges of Earl's Dene, were strolling homeward by the banks of the Grayl. It was the close of a summer day, and the country had reached the second stage of its beauty.

The doctor's daughter was in reality the younger of the two, but she did not look so. She was not very unlike, for a girl, what her father had

been in his younger days, except that, instead of being tall and stout, she was short and inclined to be stout. In other respects, she had no particular figure to speak of—a round, more than rosy face, short turn-up nose, blue-gray eyes, and light curly hair. Even as the doctor had been considered rather a handsome man by the women of Denethorp, so was she considered a pretty girl by its men. Altogether, she looked like a good-humored country girl; and her dress was rather fine, rather slatternly, and wholly unfashionable. Marie, on the other hand, though she looked little more than a child, had in reality arrived at the advanced age of eighteen years. Her figure was neither short nor tall, but was elegant in its carriage, and that of a lady, without being so graceful as to be remarkable. Her face, which was rather of the square order, and somewhat Flemish in its complexion and contour, wore an habitual smile and was rather sweet than bright. Her dress, like that of her companion, had but little to do with any of the fashions of the last four years; but it was in as good taste as can well be contrived with a purse narrow to the last extreme. They were certainly not a distinguished-looking pair, and not such as would have received a second look from any ordinary pair of eyes.

The one chattered, the other listened; and, as a matter of course, the chatter had a great deal to do with "He."

"What do you think, Marie? Don't you think He is very ugly?"

"Really I haven't noticed. No—not so very."

"What a girl you are! You never notice any body, I think."

"Oh yes, I do."

"Come, don't pretend. I'm sure Mr. Brown looked your way at church. I saw him."

"That can hardly be, Lorry, when I don't go to church."

"Oh, I forgot you were a Dissenter. Then of course he couldn't have."

"A Catholic, Lorry."

"Oh, it's all the same. I suppose it was at Mrs. Price's girls, then."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"La, Marie, how provoking you are!"

"Why?"

"Because you are. I'm sure I wouldn't look at him for the world. He's not so good-looking as that comes to. Would I?"

"I don't see why you shouldn't, if you like."

"I think even Mark's better looking—don't you?"

"Than Mr. Brown?"

"Of course—who else? Oh, Marie! look—there's a water-rat! I'd throw something at him if I had it."

"Is that because of his color, Lorry?"

"How you do go on about Mr. Brown!" replied Laura, with delightful injustice.

"And pray who is Mr. Brown?" suddenly asked a voice behind them. "I shall be jealous if you don't take care; and then—"

Miss Laura started and turned round. "La, Mark, how you do make one jump, to be sure!" she exclaimed. Marie held out her hand, with just a little more color in her face than before.

Not that either had the least reason to be alarmed. Mark Warden was only a manly-looking boy of an uncomfortable age, with little remarkable about him except that he was singular-

ly unlike his sister, and that the want of likeness was entirely in his favor; for he was tall and lank, with a thin pale face, square forehead, straight nose, strong, thin lips, and sharp, decided gray eyes, which were just now lit up triumphantly.

"You didn't expect to meet me, you two?" he asked. "I've got some news. Guess."

"Oh, do tell us!" exclaimed Lorry.

"You see before you, young ladies, a scholar of St. Margaret's College, Cambridge."

"La! Mark, what in the world's that?"

"It means some one that'll be a fellow of St. Margaret's one of these days—perhaps a bishop! What do you say to that?"

"Oh, Mark, what do you mean?"

So then he explained to them both his great success with that glowing flow of spirit that is born from no success in life but the first. Both the girls caught, each in her own different way, the contagion of his triumph; and both to the full shared his interest in the immediate fact that he was no longer a schoolboy, and would be a full-blown Cambridge man in October.

"And the young squire'll be there too, I hear say," said Lorry, who was as much impressed by the fact that her brother would be with the young squire as by any part of the story.

Mark looked contemptuous, but smiled, for this meant something to him also. He did not explain to them the difference between a scholar and a fellow-commoner.

To be no longer a schoolboy! That in itself is a great thing: it is to feel that one is really a man—to feel it much more strongly, alas! than when manhood does really come, and one finds out how little it means, after all. Mark at this moment had the sensation of being a new creature altogether, and he looked at the outside world with altogether new eyes. He even found out already, for instance, that feminine sympathy was a pleasant thing, especially when it flowed from one who was not his sister. Possibly it was some unconscious instinctive feeling that this was so with him that had called up the shadow of a blush upon the cheek of Marie on meeting her old tyrant and playfellow.

Besides, Mark Warden had always been, not only her tyrant, but her hero—not an unusual combination, by the way. She was by nature prone to hero-worship, and, next to her cousin, the doctor's son held the highest place in her little social Pantheon. She naturally, and as a matter of course, admired most in others the strength and talent in which she was supposed, and supposed herself, to have no part. Now Mark Warden was not a boy of the most ordinary sort, although there are plenty of boys like him. What his character became when fully formed will appear in due course. But at present it may be said that he apparently inherited but few of his father's qualities. The doctor used to say of his son with pride, "Look at my son Mark; there's an old head on young shoulders for you!" His schoolfellows set him down as being a prig, and his masters held him up as the model boy, alike in point of character, of industry, and of talent. But his father, his schoolfellows, and his masters were all wrong. In such a matter the instinct of a girl, however young she may be, is infallible; and no young girl ever admires an old head on young shoulders, a prig, or a model boy. It is

of the nature of a Sophia to hate a Master Bliffl. In point of fact the head of Mark was to the full as young as his shoulders, and was filled, besides, with all sorts of impossible dreams: he had no real love of books; he cared not a straw for the good opinion of any body; his talent was not brilliant; and his freedom from scrapes was simply the result of his industry, which itself was utterly against the grain of his nature.

Does this sound inconsistent? If so, it is not because it was really so. The square brow and the strong mouth, so early developed, were sure signs that the boy, young as he was, was capable of forming a purpose, and of resolutely keeping to it when it was formed. Every large school contains some such boys; though of course in an inconsiderable minority.

Now Mark, like most whom nature has rendered fit to do something in the world, was a born dreamer; and as he strolled with his rod and line along the Grayl and through the park of Earl's Dene, he felt to the full that discontent with his lot in life which every professional dreamer knows so well. His own position, his own prospects, were poor enough. His father, now that Dene-thorp had grown in size and in consequence, no longer in his own person represented the colleges of surgeons and physicians. The doctor had at first flourished simply because he had had the whole field to himself; for, as may have been gathered already, he had no qualities that render success superior to accident. It is not necessary, indeed, that a country surgeon should possess the suavity and polished manners so essential to the well-doing of his *confrère* of the city. A certain roughness and bluntness is in by no means ungraceful keeping with the character; but then, if he has them not, he must have something better. Now, while the ladies of the place, who no longer consisted of his old admirers, but to a great extent of strangers whom the mills had gathered together from various parts of the country, were disgusted with his loud and what they considered vulgar manners—for the ladies of the mills were mightily particular on the score of vulgarity—with his utter want of tact, and with the flavors of tobacco and spirits from which he was now seldom free, their husbands found out that, good fellow as he certainly was in the smoking-room and hunting-field, he was never to be found when wanted; that he took no personal interest in his cases; that he never kept an appointment with any thing like punctuality; and that, from carelessness, though not from dishonesty, there was always something wrong about his bills. Besides these easily perceptible defects, his skill was not extraordinary, and his knowledge behind the time; for he never read, and saw no practice but his own from one year's end to the other. Perhaps, on the whole, he did not kill quite so many patients as either of his two rivals, but then he certainly allowed a great many more to die.

The result of this state of things will readily be imagined; and Mark could not help comparing himself with the heir of Earl's Dene, for instance, who was scarcely so old as he, and who was yet, for no reason that his dissatisfied mind could find out, a spoiled favorite of fortune. Gradually and unconsciously, as with many another boy of lower birth and worse prospects, the idea of one day becoming rich and great became part of his very nature, and this, in due course, grew from being

an unconscious idea, to be a set, conscious purpose. By the time he was fourteen he had even chosen the means. These suggested themselves to him in a sudden flash, as it were, when he happened once to be in Redchester at Assize time, and was told that the judge whom he saw sitting in scarlet and ermine, and heard addressed as "my lord," was now a peer of the realm, but had once swept out a shop in a country town. So he made up his mind to become a barrister—not quite so easy a step to take in those days as in these. But for him, the best road to the bar was through a college-fellowship; his only road to the university was a scholarship; and to gain that, he must work hard at school. And so he did set himself to work hard, and thus gained his first step towards the woollack.

But also, like most dreamers, he was reserved. He kept his schemes locked in his own breast, not because he was afraid of ridicule, but because it was simply not his nature to make confidences. Indeed, to a certain extent, he was in the same position as Marie. There was no one about him capable of giving him sympathy, far less of aiding or directing him. His father was proud, and his sister fond, of him; but he was outside, if not above them both, and he knew it, exaggerating the distance with the conceit of his age and nature. And thus it was that, unamiable as his character may be thought, it was quite strong enough to gain the admiration of the strength-worshipping Marie.

III.

ABOVE all things, however, let it be remembered that he was, after all, but eighteen, and that a few months of comparative idleness, after many months' very hard work, were now before him.

These two facts lead to the very germ whence this story springs.

In the very first paragraph of the first part of this introduction to it, the reader received a warning. That warning is repeated here, because, in spite of what people profess, they are, in fact, perpetually craving after complete consistency of character, and are disappointed when they do not find it. Of course, verbally, and as an abstract proposition, every body is always quite ready to admit that there is no such thing in the world except, just possibly, in the case of consistent stupidity and consistent obstinacy. But this creed is not held so practically as its orthodoxy deserves.

It will doubtless be gathered, from this solemn opening, that the resolute and practical Mark Warden, with a by no means impossible dream of the enforced celibacy of a fellowship before him, fell under the influence of an altogether inconsistent dream, and that he indulged both these dreams simultaneously. In point of fact, youth and leisure, and sudden freedom from the fetters of hard work, are fully sufficient to account for this. But, unhappily, tellers of stories have, for the most part, combined to treat the conscious wish to marry for love as a proof of youthful unworldliness and want of practicality. In reality, it is not a proof of anything whatever. On the contrary, the most worldly, the most prudent, the most practical, are just as likely to make absurd

and imprudent marriages for love as their neighbors.

In short, there is scarcely any thing that a man may not do, however inconsistent it may be with his general character, without offending against the laws even of common probability. David betrays Uriah, and yet remains the most pious of men; Hector runs away at the mere sight of Achilles, and yet remains the bravest; Nero can not find it in his heart to sign an ordinary death-warrant, and yet remains the most cruel; Napoleon marries his first empress for love, and yet remains the most heartless. And so, to compare very great things with very small, Mark Warden spends his holiday in falling in love with his sister's friend, without ceasing to be as ambitious, as practical, and as prudent as ever.

But more than this. When a self-willed and practical boy has made up his mind that he is in love with a woman, he is far more likely to attempt to push matters to their extreme point than if he were older, or were of a romantic and sentimental nature. And yet it must not be thought from this that the reader is going to be called upon to swallow such a monstrous notion as that one of Mark Warden's character should, even for love's sake, throw up his chances and projects, and at once burden himself with a penniless wife and her relations. However inconsistent men may be and are, that would be too absurd.

Nevertheless, if all this is borne in mind, and if it is also remembered that, with a great amount of self-will and a strong disposition to self-indulgence—all the stronger because it was kept under restraint—Mark Warden had always taken care to be clear of all scrapes, and to be on the safe side; that, with a determination to do every thing that he wished to do, whether the object were prudent or no, he invariably chose the most prudent means of doing it; that he had quite made up his mind to become a fellow of his college and to make Marie his wife; and if, besides this, are borne in mind the nature and disposition of Marie—her entire subjection to Mark, her intense belief in him, her complete want of any one to whom she might look for advice and rational sympathy—then it will be easy enough to account for what took place before the end of October.

It is presumably unnecessary to go step by step through the whole history of Mark Warden's first love. In its outward progress, no love-affair of boy and girl could be more natural or free from any but the most ordinary excitement. So delicate, intangible, and, for the most part, so unimpassioned a subject as first love hardly falls within the coarse grasp of prose. Its very nature abhors the minute elaboration rendered necessary by any attempt to confine its subtle spirit in the bonds of definite words and regular sentences. But still, in this particular case, there were some peculiarities that demand notice.

Now of first love there are two kinds. The first is of that kind which may be called calf-love *par excellence*, when a very young man idly fancies himself in love with the first woman outside his own familiar circle who comes to hand, be she old or young, fair or foul, marchioness or milliner: this dies out as soon as the lover has seen a second. But there is another kind, which is as strong as love's later growths, and even stronger. The first kind is almost invariably absurd. Ten

to one the lady is utterly unsuited to her adorer in respect of character, position, age—in short, of every thing; and a hundred to one she laughs at him into the bargain. When, however, it happens, as it does sometimes, that the love is only a development of long-standing and affectionate acquaintance on both sides; when age, character, and position are all as they should be; when the girl looks up to instead of down upon her lover; and when the latter, though a boy in years, has the power of forming fixed resolves, then, though he will very probably fall out of love again, still, while he is in love, he does not love in play. Men, after all, fall out of love fully as often as boys; so that first and last love may sometimes be much the same thing in every respect.

It very seldom happens that one so young as Mark was now finds himself really looked up to by any girl or woman outside his own family. The peculiarity of his position in this respect was in itself more than enough to flatter the vanity, which he held in common with all mankind, into a very good imitation of love, even had other circumstances not brought about something much more than a mere imitation of it. There was certainly no doubt that he was now Marie's hero more than ever. As his self-confidence increased, so did her diffidence. And this feeling of hers, absurd in itself, was not altogether unreasonable by comparison. She, having seen nothing of the world, could only judge what it and its inhabitants were like from her experience of Denethorp; and she was quite right in thinking that her lover, intellectually speaking, was the best man in the place. And then, when he who was her hero told her that he loved her—her, the plain and stupid Marie—the surprise of her sudden glory was enough in itself to make her whole soul overflow in return.

To wish for a thing, and to try to get it at once, are with the Mark Wardens of the world one and the same thing. They do not care for the pleasures of anticipation, and revel in *coups de main*. And so, with him, to wait for the end when he could seize it without having to wait for it was simply out of the question. But then his coming college career—what was he to do? Of giving up that, especially after his recent success, he was just as incapable as of waiting for Marie. Ambition and impatient love were fairly at war.

Meanwhile the days and weeks slipped by with that rapidity of flight that belongs to all things in that magical world in which both were now living. Marie developed wonderfully, and in many ways, under this new and strange influence. Life had come to mean something now beyond a round of mending and washing, and walking with her friend, and the whole of life was absorbed in pride and happiness.

Generally speaking, a girl of seventeen is far older than a boy of eighteen, but it was not so in this case; and instead of being mistress of the situation, she was only too willing to deliver up her whole self into his hands if he required it. Indeed, had she been less innocent than she was, the position would have been full of extreme danger for her. The relation between lovers is almost invariably of much the same character as that between a tyrant and a slave, either one way or the other; and, in this case, Marie was certainly not the tyrant. Mark could not even quarrel with her; he could not even invent the small-

est cause for imaginary jealousy. If the vacation had lasted much longer, his happiness must have inevitably become tame; and Marie, to whom up to the end it was nothing but a period of the wildest and most intense excitement, would never have dreamed of keeping him up to the proper fever-heat by such artificial means as women for the most part know so well how to use.

But the vacation flew by only too quickly for both, and it was fated that before it was over she was to pass through a period of excitement indeed.

One day her impatient tyrant asked her to marry him—to marry him before the beginning of his approaching three years' absence, and to marry him secretly. He was, of course, not wholly open as to his motives for making this proposal, even to himself. But he was wholly honest in what he did say. He laid before her his great love for her: he told her how upon her depended, as he sincerely felt, the whole of his happiness: how, in fact, he *must* marry her at once—an illogical but always a most powerful argument in such cases—how, on the other hand, all his prospects in life depended upon his success at college—how he should, as he fully believed, do nothing there unless his mind and heart were at ease—how, if he felt that it was for his wife he was working, he should do every thing in the world—and, lastly, how all his fine prospects would be ruined should their marriage be known to others before the end of at least three years. In a word, he argued, she would destroy him if she refused to marry him at once, and ruin him if she did not marry him secretly. Of course he urged all this in a far more lover-like manner; but this is what it all came to.

Not only was Marie singularly poor in friends, but if she had had troops of them, their united opinion would not have weighed a feather, or rather a tuft of down, against the wish of Mark. Besides, the proposal itself was made, as it were, under the seal of confession. Still she could not help feeling, in spite of her ignorance of the world's ways, that somehow she had been asked to do what was not right. She would have been content to wait for twenty years—why should not he? And so, almost to his anger, she did for once show very nearly the spirit of a mouse, and gained time to think.

But even so does the mouse gain time to think when the cat suffers her for a moment to get a few inches away from his inevitable claws. Marie did think, or rather fancied that she thought; and this was what all her thinking came to.

Self-denial was with her a habit. To please any one she loved, she would willingly have jumped from the top of the church-tower; to save her lover, there was absolutely nothing that she would not have done. Every word that he, in his wisdom, had said to her she believed implicitly. How or why should she not? And she could not, when she came to reason, seriously think that what he wished her to do could be really wrong. If to do what he asked her involved self-sacrifice, why, so much the better. And then, after all, to conceal what she meant to do from others would cost no effort and no shame. Her shyness, beyond the surface of which no eye but his had cared to penetrate, had grown into an artificial reserve that was none the less a part of her now for having but little to do with

her real nature. No one ever caring to know her thoughts and feelings, she had acquired a habit of not telling them; and as no one ever asked her questions about what she did or where she went, she naturally assumed that no one cared. Though not self-confident, she was self-sufficing; and so in this matter too, she, as a matter of course, followed the advice of her own heart.

As to how and where the ceremony that was to make them husband and wife was to be performed, there was but little real difficulty. Mark Warden was not likely to be conquered by mere details.

In Denethorp secrecy would have been impossible, and but little less so in Redchester. But in the neighboring county, some thirty miles away, was the large and important city of B——, where a man might do many more difficult things than getting married without a soul being the wiser. Mark Warden, some few weeks before the beginning of the Cambridge term, found out that he wanted a tutor for mathematics. He told his father so, who, as usual, thought that whatever his son did was all right, and who in fact never thought of actively interfering with his children so long as what they wanted to do did not interfere with his own momentary comfort. He therefore scarcely listened when Mark went on to say that he must find the required help at B——. Indeed he would have been much more interested had he been told that it was likely to be a wet day. As to expense, the scholarship was henceforth to cover every thing forever. He happened to have a little money by him just then; and so he gave his son a few guineas, on a sort of semi-understanding that he was never to be asked for any money again, and, if the truth were known, was not very much grieved when the house was left once more to himself and Lorry; for Mark had come to take not over-kindly to his shiftless ways and acquaintances of the bar parlor. So the future Fellow of St. Margaret's went to stay for a while in B——, and in the beginning of October, when all was arranged, sent Marie enough money to bring her there too.

Then, it is true, she felt frightened at what she was going to do, and she would have given any thing to have been able to draw back. But it was certainly too late now. So, with much sinking at the heart and much confusion, she made a half-true excuse for going over to Redchester. Thence she reached B—— in the forenoon; and from B—— she returned home the very same evening.

Of course they had, to say the least of it, been guilty of a desperate piece of folly. But enough has now been said to show that, under the circumstances, their folly was not only natural, but almost a necessary consequence of their respective characters, and of the relation in which they respectively stood to each other and to those about them.

When the next morning came, Marie found herself half proud, half frightened to think that she was now a wife—at least in law and in name; for what being a wife means she knew no more now than two days ago. Her first unconscious feeling when she woke was one of wonder that the world had not come to an end. She almost thought that she must have been dreaming, and she almost anxiously felt under her pillow for the ring that she was not allowed to wear. But in

spite of the secret that filled her heart, the feeling with which she met her father was neither of fear nor of shame. Mark would be a great man one of these days; and, like the child she was, she looked forward to telling her father the news, when the time came to tell it, as a pleasant surprise. Her only really uncomfortable thought was that she was not allowed to tell her friend Laura that they had become sisters. She was certainly terribly innocent.

But if her innocence had caused her to commit a great error, it had also stood her in good stead. After all,

"The surest panoply is innocence;"

and so it had been with her.

In a day or two her husband in name and in law returned, and a day or two after that he came to bid her good-bye. It was a real parting; for at that time to go to Cambridge from so distant a place as Denethorp did not mean, at least in the case of a poor man who really intended to devote himself to the work of the place, to be absent for a few weeks at a time, and then to come home for weeks or months. It meant with Mark an almost unbroken absence of three years.

To him, with all his ambition and hope, the parting was full of pain. To her it meant almost desolation. But there was no help for it; and at the last moment, as he passed her window on his way to the coach, she bravely held back her tears for a moment in order that she might give him a smile of hope and encouragement, which made his old purpose seem faint indeed. He felt that to make her happy, and not himself great, must be his purpose now.

So much at present for these. Meanwhile it must not be forgotten that there was such a person in the world of Denethorp as Miss Clare of Earl's Dene; and this must be more especially borne in mind, as she was now, in fact, Denethorp's great lady.

With her earlier life, as has already appeared, her Denethorp subjects were not very familiar. Her mother had died soon after giving her birth, and she had been almost constantly in London with her father, and scarcely ever at her country home, for which, being a man of pleasure and politics, he had no taste. It was generally supposed that she had refused countless offers of marriage from countless suitors, who were attracted by her wealth or beauty, or both; and it was known that at about the age of four-and-twenty she had gone abroad with her aunt, a Mrs. Lester, whose husband was something in the diplomatic service. After some years she returned home again, and then both her father and herself took up their residence at Earl's Dene, where, very soon afterwards, Mr. Clare died. She was his only child and sole heir; and by the time that she came to the property, all her vague reputation for "oddness" had entirely passed away. She was a great lady, and she evidently intended to play out her rôle of great lady to the fullest extent. So successfully did she carry out her intention that she very soon became regarded with an almost awful reverence by all within reach of her influence, and with rebellious dislike by those with whom she, as a stanch Tory and High-Church woman, had long declared open war—that is to say, by the reformers of the cloth-mills and the growing body of Dissenters. To

those who acknowledged her authority she was generous and even kind; but to those who did not, she was certainly not kind, and could be very often ungenerous. She was, in fact, endowed with no little of that political asperity which has been said by a great politician to be as unbecoming to a woman as a beard. Her views about Church and State were both decided and practical, and, like the lady in Molière, what she wished she wished furiously.

But certainly these present views of hers would have desperately astonished those persons who remembered her youth, not in Denethorp, but in London, where it had been principally passed. These, too, had considered her odd, and with reason.

Nature had given her, besides her beautiful person, a precocious intelligence, an energetic mind, strong passions, quick feelings, a most excitable imagination, and an amount of obstinacy that, in so young a woman, was perfectly appalling. Circumstance and education had given these dangerous qualities a peculiar direction. The times in which she lived were peculiar, and she was from her cradle wrapped round in an atmosphere of politics. Her father lived for politics. In the circle in which he moved nothing but politics was talked from morning till night. Politics formed her whole idea of life and society. Being singularly impressible, and only too ready to take an active interest in any thing that was brought before her notice, she caught the contagion fully. But, unhappily, hers was one of those minds that are never satisfied unless they are in chronic opposition to the general or predominant views taken by the world in which they move. Of course, this love of opposition for its own sake is any thing but uncommon. But while the Lydia Langshishes of her age and acquaintance were dreaming of romantic elopements with impecunious ensigns, simply because their friends wished them to marry sensibly and to be well off in the world, she was bent upon saying and doing things that made every body stare, simply because her friends wished her to live the life of a conventional fine lady, and either not to think for herself at all, or else to think as she was told. It was certainly not that she in reality liked being a fine lady less, but that she loved opposition more. Had she been a woman of real genius or genuine independence of character, she would very likely have made a name for herself; but as it was, she only got called names by the society in which she lived, which could not comprehend how an English girl of good family could even play at holding such strange and revolutionary notions as hers.

The truth was that, considering her character, there was nothing more strange in her holding these notions than there would have been in her holding the very opposite, had circumstances been different. She was simply wild, romantic in her own way, and ambitious of notoriety. Had her father and his set been the friends of Mr. Fox, she would, on the same principle, and with no more reason, have called herself a Tory of the extremest sort; but as he and his friends were steady supporters of the Cabinet of that day, she was bound, in order to be in her natural state of opposition, to take up with the other extreme. Not only so, but her natural tendency to eccentricity, which in her childhood had led her to scorn dolls and to rebel against needlework, caused her, when she grew up, to affect a learned

and philosophical contempt for the usual amusements and pursuits of her age and station. Her heroes were Washington and Lafayette; her authors, Godwin and Rousseau. She scribbled a little herself, both in wild prose and vapid verse, and even carried her speculations into regions to which a young and unmarried woman is generally supposed not to possess the key. As may easily be imagined, her father—who never had time to see very much of her, who was quite unable to control her, and who could not in the least understand her, partly, no doubt, because the greater share of her obstinacy was a part of her inheritance—was terribly annoyed, and even alarmed. It was certainly not a pleasant thing for him to hear the arguments of the "Political Justice" retailed openly at the head of his table before cabinet ministers; and those of the "Natural History of Religion" before bishops. He made the grave mistake of fancying that she might make a final display of her strange form of romance by perhaps running off with some Democratic adventurer, just to prove her belief in the doctrine of universal equality—that she might do worse than marry a penniless ensign, even if she cared to go through the ceremony of marriage at all. Of course, in fancying any such thing he only showed how little he understood her real character. Her Republican ideas did not in the least affect her family pride, which was greater than his own. But the mistake, under the circumstances, was not unnatural; and he was accordingly only too delighted when, after many unpleasant domestic scenes, his wife's sister, Mrs. Lester, offered for a time to relieve him of this *enfant terrible*.

But, as has been said already, they became good friends again before he died; and woe now to any one who in her presence should drop a slighting word even of my Lord Castlereagh. Her opinions had changed, but not her nature. Nevertheless, with all her politics and all her narrowness, she was a very good woman in her way. She tried with all her strength to do what she thought was right, and she hated with all her

soul what she thought was wrong. Doubtless she would have been a better woman still—better, at least, as a woman—had it been her lot to have had children of her own upon whom to expend some of the spare energy of her nature. She had, to a great extent, endeavored to supply the want by adopting, not only as her heir but as her son, the orphan grandchild of Mrs. Lester, who was now, like Mark Warden, about to proceed to Cambridge.

Certainly in every material sense the chosen heir of Earl's Dene was to be accounted one of fortune's favorites. With whatever faults or drawbacks it might have—for nothing is quite perfect—no finer place, no better estate, could well be found, out of the hands of the peerage, in all England. If, in addition to the enjoyment of its real advantages, its owner should take a fancy to have a handle to his name, he would have but to ask and to obtain. Indeed it was rather a matter of surprise in the neighborhood that the late owner had not done so. The artist could admire it for its beauty; the sportsman for the capabilities for sport of every sort and kind that it afforded; the politician for the member that it had, as a matter of course, sent to the House of Commons ever since the days of the Earls of Wendale; and every body for the productiveness of the land and its complete freedom from serious encumbrances. But to the angler especially, who had spent a long summer day by the Grayl, and who then, after sauntering past the deer in the Lodge Park up the long avenue, and round the walks of the flower-garden, whose fragrance was such as belongs to those gardens only that have been mellowed by time, and filled with the sweet memories of many generations of fruits and flowers, had been privileged to crown his day with the nobler fragrance of the claret, for which the cellars of Earl's Dene, in spite of frequent feminine rule, were renowned far and wide, the place would indeed seem to be a true province of the earthly paradise into which no trouble might come. And now it is time that its story should fairly begin.

BOOK I.—ANGÉLIQUE.

CHAPTER I.

It was a soft and fine June evening in the year 181—, so wonderfully soft and fine, indeed, that it was the very type of what an evening ought to be in that best of months. And yet, strange to say, although the inside of the coach that passed through Denethorp every day was full, there were no more than three of its passengers who preferred to closeness and confinement the sweetness and fragrance of the open air. Of these "outsides," one had come the whole distance from London, another had joined the coach some three or four stages off, and the third had mounted to his seat in the after-part while the horses were being changed at Redchester. The latter was absorbed in conversation with the guard about the affairs of the road, the occupant of the box-seat was sound asleep, while the passenger who

sat immediately behind was wrapped in a meditation that rendered him as blind to what lay to left and right as if his eyes also had been closed. Presently, however, the sleeper slowly opened his eyes, gave a good long stretching yawn, and then, having satisfied himself as to the point of the journey at which he and his fellow-passengers had arrived, turned round to take a survey of his temporary companions, in the course of which his eyes at once encountered those of his rear-rank man. The faces of both brightened into recognition as they exclaimed simultaneously,

"Lester!"

"Warden! why, where do you fall from?"

Both were young men of nearly the same age, which was apparently about two-and-twenty, more or less; but, in every other respect, they were different enough.

The occupant of the box-seat—he who had

been addressed as Lester—would at once, and under any circumstances, have been set down as an uncommonly good-looking fellow, not only by women, but by men also. Nor was he good-looking only in the sense of having regular features, a healthy complexion, a good figure, and an exceedingly pleasant expression, but in the far more important sense of being firmly and strongly made, without any undue preponderance of one pair of limbs or of one set of muscles over another; in the sense of looking as though he could hold his own in all manly exercises that became a gentleman. Although he had been sleeping in an extremely cramped and uncomfortable position, yet, when he roused himself, he was wide awake at once; and the ring of his voice as he spoke seemed to show that he had fallen asleep not from weariness, but from the want of something better to do.

The other, whom he had called Warden, was also sufficiently good-looking, but after a far less healthy and less animal style. His features were far less regular, and his complexion far more pale; his lips were thinner and firmer, and his eyes more deeply set; and while the forehead of Lester was without a fold, his brow, less open, bore the pre-sage of that kind of frown that is caused by the constant exercise of the brain. In point of figure, though there was about him no apparent want of bodily strength, those who have an eye for such matters would have said that whatever power he possessed was nervous rather than muscular; and he by no means shared with his acquaintance the signs of being practised in outdoor pursuits. In spite of their nearness to each other in point of age, there was much of the same sort of difference between them that is supposed to distinguish the townsman from the countryman, and the man who neglects the body for the sake of the mind, from him who neglects the mind for the sake of the body. And yet it is almost unfair to both of them to say this; for Lester, in spite of the regularity of his features, looked any thing but empty or stupid—his eyes were too lively and his lips too ready to smile for that; and Warden certainly did not look as though he had neglected exercise so much as to be without sufficient firmness of muscle for the ordinary needs of a man's life. Still, one was as plainly the young squire as the other was the student; and their voices, too, had this difference—that while Lester's was pleasant, and essentially that of a gentleman, it was loud and unrestrained; and that Warden's, while it was clearer, better cultivated, and more subdued, was rather reserved in its tone, and was, besides, not free from a perceptible tinge of provincialism in its accent, though not more than just enough to make one suspect that the social position of the man himself was probably higher than that of his father and mother.

All these physical details were amply perceptible, for the evening was so warm that neither of the young men cared to encumber himself with more wrappings than were absolutely necessary. Indeed, by a moderately quick eye they might have been noted during the short pause that elapsed before Warden answered,

"It is odd I did not recognize you when I got up. I joined the coach at Thurlleigh. You are bound to Earl's Dene, I suppose?"

"Yes, I'm bound for the old place. Rather a

bore, though, isn't it, just at this time of year of all others?"

"You come from town, then?"

"I should think so. Where else should a man be just now? I hope my aunt—I always call Miss Clare my aunt, you know—hasn't called me down for nothing. She's rather apt to sometimes. I can't think what she could want to say to me that she couldn't write just as well. Where are you from—Cambridge? How long have you been down?"

"Only a day or two. I came nearly straight."

"And now I suppose you will make some stay in Denethorp? Well, you must come over, and we'll have a day or two by the Grayl together, or something. By-the-way, I have to congratulate you, haven't I?"

"Oh, about my fellowship? Thanks." He did not, however, give the thanks that he expressed so curtly the advantage of much warmth of manner. Perhaps he fancied that the congratulation had been offered a little too patronizingly; and certainly it had been spoken far too carelessly to suit the ears of one who had achieved a great and tangible success. It was natural for him to forget that, while to himself his brilliantly-won fellowship—the reward of three long years of hard and self-denying study—meant competence and honor for the present, and a sound and strong foundation on which to build the fabric of the future, to the heir of Earl's Dene it could seem nothing more than just a two or three hundred a year that might be worth a man's taking if it came in his way, but was certainly not worth making a fuss about.

"And don't you congratulate me too?" Lester asked in his turn.

There were plenty of things, Warden thought, on which his companion might reasonably be congratulated. But he said,

"I would with pleasure, if I knew what upon. Not matrimony?" he added, with a smile.

"Ah, you think I've been caught in town? Not I. I was up to them, I flatter myself. No—I mean on their not having ploughed me, of course. We haven't met since then, have we? You know the odds were ten to one against the name Lester being in the list at all, and any thing you please against my more than scraping through. But I suppose you wranglers and prizemen don't speculate on the chances of the 'poll.' Well, those weren't a bad three years of ours, were they? And yet somehow I was devilish glad when they were over. One did get enough at last of doing the same sort of things over and over again." What would he have said, by the way, had his days been spent like the days of Warden? He might then, indeed, have had reason for his complaint—and yet very likely in that case he would not have made it. "And yet I was sorry too," he went on. "Holloa! here we are at Graylford. Just let me feel the ribbons, Tom. I'll just run you down to the last corner before the bridge. Madam wouldn't like me to drive up to the gates, I suppose." The coachman resigned his throne with a confidence that he certainly would not have shown had he not known his man. "That's it, Tom—and now for a bit of a spurt."

While, guided by the skillful hand of Hugh Lester, the four horses launched out into a fast canter along the smooth and level high-road,

Warden for a few instants resigned himself to the full enjoyment of that most delightful of all forms of rapid motion of which the now more than half-forgotten pleasures have been too often and too well described to need further description here. Neither by temperament nor by habit, however, was he capable, for any length of time together, of holding fast the delight of merging self-consciousness and the sense of personal existence in simple physical enjoyment. Besides, he was tired with his journey, for he had been travelling many hours before he joined the coach; and when he had chanced to fall asleep, his slumber had not been so dreamless and so refreshing as that of Lester. He had, too, been rather overworking his brain of late, under the strain of recent competition, so that his nerves were not in the best imaginable order. The result was that, as each spring of the horses brought him nearer and nearer to his home at Denethorp, his mind indulged more and more in those groundless fancies and presentiments that are so familiar to all who return home after a long absence, especially in cases where correspondence has been unfrequent and fragmentary; groundless fancies and ridiculous presentiments of evil which he who indulges them will not own, even to himself, but which are none the less real and none the less disagreeable for all their groundlessness and all their absurdity. There is a kind of half-formed idea lurking in the breasts of even the least vain among us, that somehow in our absence the things and the people that we care about are more likely to go wrong than right; and the excitement of seeing our home and our friends once more is very often due less to our affection for them than to a causeless fear of finding, say, our house burnt to the ground, our children laid up with scarlet fever, our servants absconded with the plate, a heap of letters waiting for an answer, and, according to our sex, our wife eloped or our husband smoking in the drawing-room. It is true that Warden had no children, no plate, and no correspondence; but, in such a case, fancy can find plenty of food on which to feed without any assistance from facts. And then, too, he could not help being vexed with himself that he, a high wrangler, a prizeman, and Chancellor's medallist of his year, and now a Fellow of his College—that he, who had become a sort of lion in his own set, and had thereby come to feel as though he had already done something and become somebody in the world—that he, who was all this, and had done all this, and who was expected by all his friends, as well as by himself, to be and to do a very great deal more in a few years' time—should have, somehow or other, been forced to feel now that he had not been able to meet, on at least terms of equality, a man like Lester, upon whom, with all the vanity of his age, he thought himself entitled to look down as from an infinite height of intellectual superiority. He was naturally imbued with the common and intelligible but profoundly dangerous and often fatal error, that mental superiority is worth more than a single straw in the ordinary social intercourse between man and man; an error to which, whatever the case may be now, clever and successful university men used at all events to be peculiarly liable, and from which, unless they afterwards mixed freely and largely with various classes of society, they

were very often unable to shake themselves free. Warden was now, in fact, receiving his first lesson in this matter. At every step of the road that took him farther from Cambridge and nearer to Denethorp, his superiority to Lester seemed to fade away more and more rapidly, while the only distinction between them that would be recognized in the county became distinct in proportion. He could not help being aware that he was becoming once more degraded to the position that belonged to him in his native town as the son of an obscure and struggling country doctor, while Lester, in a like manner, was rising to his full rank as heir of Earl's Dene. The utterly different kind of life necessarily led by the two while both were at Cambridge, and their different social station even there, had not allowed their slight acquaintance to develop into any thing more than slight acquaintance; so that no habits of familiar intercourse had tended to bridge over this old gap between them, which seemed to Warden's eyes to be wider than ever, now that he was of an age and in a position to perceive more clearly its breadth and its nature. Indeed to a certain extent this feeling of his was altogether new. In the old times he had always, like the rest of the world of Denethorp, been ready enough to pay all due deference to the young squire, whose occasional kindly notice he had been proud to receive; but that was while he was as yet nothing but the struggling student, with his way in life yet to begin. Now, on the contrary, he could not persuade himself that it was becoming on the part of the successful student, with a future of infinite possibilities opening before him, to accept with the same kind of deference the patronage of his intellectual inferior; and so he felt inclined to be angry with himself for not being able to assert his equality, and for having, from force of old habit, relapsed against his will into his old way of regarding the local supremacy of the Clares and all that belonged to them.

In spite, however, of this vague disquietude of spirit, still the smooth rapidity of the pace, his fatigue, the aimless wandering of his thoughts, and the warm stillness of the air, had nearly succeeded in sending him to sleep in reality when the bugle of the guard sounded, as was the invariable practice when the mail arrived within sight of the long and magnificent avenue of beech-trees that led up through the park from the high-road. Lester rapidly gave up the reins to their rightful holder, and once more sank to the level of a mere passenger.

"That was a pretty fair run, wasn't it, Warden?" he asked, as he began to collect his coats, sticks, and other miscellaneous small articles preparatory to leaving the coach. "Well, old fellow, as I suppose we are to be neighbors for some days, at any rate—how long do you stay at Denethorp?"

"I don't know quite what my movements are for the present, but I don't suppose I shall be off again in a very great hurry."

"How do you think of spending the Long? I beg its pardon: one must say the autumn, now we have both done with longs and shorts?"

"But I have not done with longs and shorts. I shall be up again next term, I expect. I have got a pupil or two, you know; and I have some idea of getting some men to read with in the Long."

"By Jove! then I have a first-rate notion. Bring your men down here, if they're decent fellows—it's quiet enough. Only mind you get a decent team, and I'll do what I can for them, you know. You shall coach them in Homer and Euclid and all that, and I'll see after their other lines and angles. You can't say I'm a bad coach, after that spurt. Tom, here, shall give me a testimonial. But here we are. I'm always glad to look up the beeches again, though it is a bore to come down just now. Good-bye, Warden—we'll see how the trout lie before many hours are over. So look me up."

"You're very good—I shall be delighted. Good-bye."

By this time the coach had stopped at the great iron gates that were flanked by the lodge, and that bore above them the arms of the Clares, with their motto, "*Non solum nomine clarus.*" The old woman who acted as portress had run out on hearing the first blast of the bugle, and now stood with a broad smile of welcome on her face to receive the young squire. In a few seconds more, the horses, freed from the very respectable weight of Lester and his trappings, were again on their way.

Almost as soon as he was left to himself, Warden forgot the shy constraint that the other's presence had caused; and his mind, relieved from the incubus of Earl's Dene and its belongings, soon began to busy itself about more real and personal matters, while his eyes were occupied with recognizing each particular point of the road which he had not travelled for so long; but, as will be remembered, the remainder of the journey was extremely short in respect of both time and distance. Indeed the tower of Denethorp Church was plainly visible, and when the wind was in the right quarter its peal of bells was often audible from the lodge-gate; and so, in a very little while, he in his turn was descending from his seat at the door of the King's Head, and looking at his own not very heavy amount of luggage. Then, leaving his portmanteau to be sent after him from the inn, the new Fellow of St. Margaret's walked across the market-place and down one of the principal streets until he came to a brick house standing in a small garden at the edge of the town, the door of which bore a tarnished brass plate inscribed with the name of Mr. Warden, surgeon.

CHAPTER II.

To return, however, to him who was certainly the more important personage of the two in the eyes of the world, if not in those of his travelling companion.

The traveller whose destination happened to be Earl's Dene would, in those days—and for that matter, in these days also—pass through the iron gates already mentioned, and then proceed three-quarters of a mile, more or less, along the magnificent avenue, having on his left hand an inclosure called the Lodge Park, which was well stocked with deer, that have not, even now, had to yield their old domain to a more useful if less picturesque generation of sheep, until he arrived at the lawn and circular carriage-drive in front of the house itself. This was a plain square building of dark-red brick, pierced with many

windows symmetrically arranged in even rows, and altogether of a far more modern appearance than the park and grounds would have led one to expect. The fact is that, while the park is of great antiquity, the house is not older than the hideous reign of George the Second, and bears conspicuously upon its face the date of the memorable year of 1746. It had been built as a substitute for some ruinous ecclesiastical buildings that had cumbered the ground ever since the dissolution of the monasteries. For Earl's Dene had of old been called Abbot's Dene, and had been a sort of offshoot of the great Abbey of Redchester, in the same county, until King Henry made a grant of it to the then Earl of Wendale. Of course, like most of the monastic estates that underwent this fate, its ownership was long looked upon as of necessity associated with the punishment appointed for the sin of sacrilege; and there was a prophetic jingle about it, of which the usual form ran thus:—

"Abbot's, King's, and Earl's Dene,
Never thrice the same again;"

which is, indeed, rather obscure, but means according to traditional interpretation, that no family should ever be able to hold it farther than from father to son—that is to say, for more than two generations. As is usual in such cases, for reasons sufficiently familiar to students of popular superstition, the prophecy was always singularly fulfilled to the letter; but inasmuch as the saying was supposed to be of the nature of a curse, and to prognosticate evil, it had been any thing but fulfilled to the spirit. The possessors of Earl's Dene invariably prospered. From the great Earl of Wendale, the original grantee, it passed in due course, when the title became extinct for want of issue male, to his granddaughter, who made a rich and advantageous marriage. From her it again came to a granddaughter; and her grandson changed his name in order to inherit another great estate in another part of England. One more lapse into the female line brought it into the possession of the grandmother, and then of the father, of Madam Clare. Before her grandmother's time the place had been uninhabited and neglected, its owners having always possessed other seats in better repair elsewhere; but Miss Langton, not being in this position, came to live there soon after her marriage; and it was by her and her husband, Colonel Clare, that the present plain but comfortable and convenient house was built. It was by them also that to the eternal sorrow of antiquaries, the monastic ruins were entirely removed, so that there is scarce left of them so much as a trace to mark the ground on which they once stood.

While Warden was traversing the short distance that lay between Earl's Dene and Denethorp, Lester strolled quietly along the avenue towards the house, wondering what could possibly be the meaning of this sudden and unwelcome summons from Miss Clare—his aunt, as he always called her, although she was really his cousin. In no long time, in spite of his leisurely pace, he had crossed the lawn, passed through the hall, and reached the drawing-room, where Madam Clare, to give her her popular title, was seated in a large arm-chair reading or sleeping, or both, or neither.

Nothing is so difficult, or rather so impossible, as to say of a man or woman that he or she is

absolutely young or old. Youth and age are essentially relative terms. Twenty years are not seldom in reality more than eighty—eighty less than twenty. To resort, however, to the device of calling a person middle-aged is as meaningless a makeshift as to use the term *mezzo-soprano* to describe a voice. It does not in the least say what the person is—it only means that it is impossible to say what he is. Now about half-way between fifty and sixty is not a great age; and yet Miss Clare certainly looked, and therefore was, old; for a really young woman, whatever the number of her years may be, never looks old. She was tall and of a commanding although not upright figure, which was large but not full; her features, still handsome, were prominent and strongly marked, and wore when, as they were now, in repose, an expression made up of sadness and severity. Her dark eyes had grown dull, and her hair gray. Her complexion was fair, but—what is seldom the case with fair complexions—inclined to be sallow. Her dress was plain, but of costly work and material, the prevailing color of it being that of lavender. As she rose from her chair to greet her self-styled nephew, and held out to him her white and delicate hand—that only part of a woman that is superior to the effects of time and sorrow—she gave the threefold impression of being a woman who had lived, who had thought, and who was rather to be feared. But this was by no means the only part of her expression, and certainly not the most pleasant part of it. When she spoke, her face wonderfully lighted up, and its signs of sorrow and severity were lost in a kind and almost gentle smile which went far to prove her to be young, after all, and that the contrast between her and Lester was to be measured by a standard, not of age but of power.

"I am glad to see you, Hugh," she said, in a voice that was grave and pleasant, but rather of the kind that women acquire together with their Italian caligraphy, and which is too conventional, too lady-like in fact, to express much character.

"I hope there is nothing wrong, aunt, that you called me down?"

"Oh no; but we'll talk of that presently. I suppose you're hungry?"

"I certainly shan't be sorry to get something to eat. You are better, I hope?"

"As well as I can expect to be now. I have been out several times lately. But now go and have your dinner. I had mine early, as usual. I have no doubt you will find it all ready for you. You will find me here when you have done. By-the-way, I have a visitor staying with me."

"Indeed! Any one I know?"

"Well, you do and you don't."

"That sounds mysterious, aunt. Is it male or female?"

"For shame, Hugh. It is Miss Raymond, of New Court."

"What! Alice? By Jove! I wonder what she's turned out. She ought to be nice, from what I remember when I was a boy."

Miss Clare smiled. "That is so very long ago, is it not? But you shall see and judge for yourself when you have had your dinner. I like her very much, but of course that is no reason that you will. Old ladies and young gentlemen don't always agree about those things. Now go and get your dinner."

"How is it she's here? I thought she was out of England."

"So she was, till very lately. But she has come back, and, of course, wanted to look at her own place—her old home, poor girl; so I asked her to stay with me. But now, do go and get your dinner. Miss Raymond will not run away; and, besides, I have something to say to you before I introduce you to your old acquaintance."

But Hugh, hungry as he was, instead of just washing his hands and sitting down at once to the good things provided for him, went to his own room and made a regular evening toilette. He might, he thought, appear before the visitor to the best advantage while he was about it.

At last, however, having amply satisfied his hunger and thirst, he returned to the drawing-room. But Miss Clare was still by herself; so he sat down near her, and disposed himself to listen dutifully to what she had to say.

"You know there's to be a general election, Hugh?"

"I should think so. Nobody is talking of any thing else."

"Well, there's to be an opposition in Denethorp."

"In Denethorp! Surely not?"

Well might Hugh Lester stare at the idea of an opposition to Madam Clare in her own town.

"It is only too true," she said.

"But it can't be serious?—it can't succeed?"

"Hugh, the fact is that things are not what they used to be. One can't help seeing it, even here."

"But who would venture—"

"It is these mill people. Just look at this and guess where I found it."

She handed him a tract, at which he looked with a puzzled air.

"What is all this, aunt? Is this the 'two-penny trash' that people talk of?"

"You see what it is. But you would never think I found it, not in the hands of a mechanic but actually in one of my own cottages. You see how this rank poison is spreading. There is a cry of turning out the 'Tory nominee,' as they call our member; and they have set up what they call a Hampden Club under our very eyes."

"But these men are not the voters."

"And in other ways the town is changed. The mills have become a power in the place; and it is that that is at the bottom of it all."

"But who have they got to stand? There's no one in the county—"

"Oh, a man from London—some friend of Sir Francis Burdett and Lord Cochrane, no doubt. But he has money, and that's what they want."

"Do you know who it is?"

"His name is Prescott, they say."

"The devil it is!—I beg your pardon, aunt."

"Do you know any thing of him, then?"

"I should think so. He's a great man with all that lot—as well known as any one in town. He's a banker, and as rich as a Jew. He's an awful rascal, I fancy, but tremendously good-looking; and he can talk, too, they say. By Jove! every woman in the place will turn White as soon as he's been an hour in it, if all's true I hear. Poor old Tom won't have a chance."

Now "poor old Tom" was a certain Captain Johnston, a harmless old gentleman, who had

represented the Clares in Parliament for the last thirty years—who was, in fact, the objectionable "Tory nominee."

"That is just what I think too. I feel that Captain Johnston will be no use to stand a serious contest. And so what I wanted to say to you is, that you must come forward yourself."

"My dear aunt!"

"You are of age, you know."

"Why, Prescott would thrash me worse than Johnston."

"Not at all. You are a Clare, you know, in all but the name, and master of Earl's Dene."

This was not bad reasoning. The electors of Denethorp might object to be any longer represented by a "warming-pan," as the phrase is; but the heir of Earl's Dene was their representative by nature. Hugh felt the force of the argument at once. He certainly did not enter into Miss Clare's views as to his candidature with much enthusiasm; for he feared, and not without reason, according to common experience, that being in the House would probably be more troublesome than pleasant, and he was not ambitious. But still he did not for a moment dream of combating them. Whatever his private inclinations might be, supposing that he was capable of considering the matter as presenting an alternative, he would feel himself bound, as a gentleman, to do whatever might be expected of him as the future head of a great county family, and as one of the Clares of Earl's Dene. "*Noblesse oblige.*" Every great house has its traditions, which are respected and accepted by its own county, and must be respected and accepted by itself: which when broken through by some degenerate member of it, crush the apostate with their fragments. The heir of Earl's Dene was far too sensible—if such a word can be used to express what was in reality the result of instinct—not to observe to the full the traditional policy of his family in every essential particular. It would have seemed to him to be treason to act otherwise. And so he submitted to become the candidate for Denethorp with the best grace in the world, and without further protest—with the same readiness to do what he could to win, and with the same zeal for his side that he was in the habit of bringing to bear upon more congenial contests.

"And now you see," said Miss Clare, "why I sent for you so suddenly. No time must be lost. Captain Johnston's address is out already, to say he does not mean to stand, and your own is prepared. You must ride over to Denethorp to-morrow and talk to White."

"What does White think of things?"

"Well, he always speaks candidly to me, and he is not sanguine. But I am. We *must* not be beat, Hugh."

"And we won't, aunt—not if I can help it."

"That's right, Hugh. Pluck—I like the word—must win; and no Clare, or Lester either, has ever wanted that." She sighed, however, as she made her boast.

"I fear it will be pluck against pluck, though, and money against money."

"Then blood will tell."

"But, from what you say, London is making itself felt in the place; and there blood doesn't seem to tell much."

"My dear boy, Earl's Dene will always be as

good as London in Denethorp, which is in — shire, and not in Middlesex."

"Well, I will see White to-morrow, by all means. And don't fear that I won't do all I know."

"Not fearing that, I fear nothing."

"I wish I could speak like Prescott, though."

"Much best not. The best orator is, after all, the man who says nothing but what is in him; and that can always be said in a very few words. You will speak well enough; and, indeed, I think that a gentleman should not speak too well. Speeches are the weapons of demagogues, which a gentleman should scorn. No—I should no more like to see you the match of a man like Mr. Prescott, than I should like to think you could use your fists like a prizefighter. To-morrow you shall tell me all the London news. Now I will introduce you to Miss Raymond. She has been taking a turn on the terrace while I was talking to you. No—don't move; I would rather call her myself."

CHAPTER III.

HUGH rose from his seat and passed his fingers through his hair.

Miss Raymond entered the drawing-room through the glass door that opened upon the terrace; and her old playmate saw at once that his presentiment had turned out to be right, and that she had turned out something very nice indeed.

But descriptions of people, though they are to a certain extent unavoidable, are always tedious and never quite satisfactory. No one ever learned to know a person from the best description. And yet, on the other hand, without some amount of personal description character would be unintelligible altogether. Fortunately, however, Miss Raymond belonged to a large and easily described type. She was young—just of age, according to Miss Clare—and with her tall but well-developed and graceful figure, bright, but not too clear complexion, gray hazel eyes, brown hair, and regular, but not too regular, features, and, best of all, with her bright and open expression and ready smile, was in appearance all that a young English girl ought to be, and still is sometimes. It need only be added that one who was not an amateur of this style of beauty might, with some reason, have asked for a little more warmth and richness, in expression as well as in coloring. But this is a matter wholly of individual taste. After all, if freshness and purity suggest coldness, it only follows that a certain amount of coldness is not to be despised. It is absurd to quarrel with England because it has not at the same time both green fields and a southern sun.

"I hope your solitary stroll has not tired you," said Miss Clare. "Let me introduce my nephew to you—Hugh, you know."

"I hope Miss Raymond will not need an introduction," said the latter, politely. "I can assure you, Miss Raymond, that I have not forgotten our old acquaintance, which is, after all, not so excessively old."

"Nor have I—and I am delighted to renew it." She had a very sweet voice, with an honest ring about it, as though she used it only to say the whole of what she meant and never a word less or more.

"And I hope it will not be interrupted for so long again. You have been a great traveller, I hear?"

"Enough, at all events, to be glad to be home again."

"Which, after all, is the great use of travel, is it not?" said Miss Clare.

And so the three dropped into a pleasant ordinary sort of chat, in which, however, Miss Clare did little but listen. Her nephew—he may as well be called what he was called by every body—and her guest found plenty to say to one another, for neither was of a silent nature; and Hugh passed altogether a very much more lively evening than he had expected, for, with his out-of-door nature, he could not help finding his aunt's quiet and usually solitary evenings a little wearisome. If he had to give up the rest of the London season, as now seemed probable, the presence of the young lady, he thought, would render his canvass much less dull, especially as she had declared herself to be passionately fond of riding. She was now, he learned, living in London with a distant relation who had been one of her guardians during her minority; but that she hated town—so she said, at least—and fully intended that New Court, of which she was mistress in her own right, should for the future see a great deal of her. Altogether their tastes seemed to match in a most remarkable manner, except with regard to the pleasures of town. Even had he not seen that she was something much better, he would have given her a high place in his good opinion as "a girl with no nonsense about her."

Was Miss Clare a match-maker? It was not her way to do any thing unusual without some definite purpose, and the presence of a guest at Earl's Dene was something very unusual. But Hugh was not given to speculation; and it can only be said that, if she had any plan in her head about him and Alice Raymond, and if she succeeded in carrying it out, it would be all the better for Hugh. Wives like the mistress of New Court are not found every day—no, nor often twice in a lifetime, seeing that she was young, pretty, amiable, lively, accomplished, of good birth, rich, with no relations, and completely mistress of herself and of her purse. But this by-the-way.

At last the evening drew to a close, and the two ladies retired, leaving Hugh to stroll about and enjoy his cigar in the pleasant night air; for, since he had been in London, he had fallen into a habit of crowning the day in a manner which was by no means universal in times when a pipe was almost the brand of a sot, and a cigar of a rake. It is probable that Madam Clare was ignorant of this habit of his, for she had never mentioned it to him, and it is very certain that she would have objected to so foreign an innovation most strongly.

In spite of his long conversation with his aunt upon the subject, his head was by no means overflowing with politics as he enjoyed this gift of a Peninsular friend of his. He was in that pleasant frame of mind that is caused by the influence of a good dinner, a pleasant evening, bodily fatigue, and the exchange of the noise of town for country quietness. Earl's Dene was simply the quietest place in the whole world—just fit, in fact, to be the dwelling-place of the very old and the very young; and though its heir was not of an

age to appreciate perfect repose for long together, still there is no time of life at which a sudden plunge into a bath of silence is not refreshing, and, for a few hours, the most delightful thing in the world. And so he found it while, in that most pleasant of all mental conditions which is called thinking of nothing, he looked from the terrace over the broad green park, over the spire of the little church of Grayford, over the silver Grayl itself, now in the moonlight more silver than ever, and over the tall woods, which had but just exchanged the green of spring for that of summer, to the low, faintly purple hills that marked the border of the Wold country.

While thus engaged, one of Miss Clare's keepers came up to him.

"Glad to see you down here again, sir," he said, touching his cap.

"I'm always glad to be down here, Roberts," he answered, with the inconsistency of honesty. "And how are things doing?"

"Oh, sir, pretty fairish. Not much doing though, sir."

"No, I suppose not. I expect you've all of you been lazy enough since I was here last."

"Well sir, there's mostly things to be done. But you see, Mr. Hugh, June isn't September."

"And you wish it was, no doubt?"

"No, sir. I takes things as they be, and they mostly comes pretty right, take 'em all in all."

"I don't know about that, Roberts. I should like to think when I go to bed to-night that one was going to have a fling at the birds in the morning."

"Well, sir, maybe you're right. But I don't know—maybe September wouldn't come so pleasant if June didn't come once a year or so. And how do you find madam, sir?"

"Well, she doesn't seem complaining."

"I be glad of that, Mr. Hugh. But you see your being here cheers her up a bit like. I be feared she do find it but dull when you're up and gone. All on us do that, sir."

"Then I must stay as long as I can, for your sakes."

"I hope you will, sir. But if you ben't too busy, just now, Mr. Hugh—"

"I don't look so, do I?"

"Well, sir, there be something I wanted to mention."

"What is it?"

"Why you see, sir, madam be main special about things, and don't like folk coming all no-how into the place, special just now, among the does, you know, sir: and I have to look after 'em. And she be right, too, sir, what with all them hands out of the town, and such—"

"Well?"

"Well, sir, most all mornings, ever since they be got fine, when I be down past the Lodge Park, where the does be, I see a young lady—leastwise a young 'oman, sir, though I don't say as she ben't a young lady—"

"Really? This is interesting."

"Yes, sir, it be. Well, Mr. Hugh, this young lady—for I be nigh sure she be a lady—gets over the rails of the Lodge Park, sir, right amid the does—"

"She can't be very careful of her clothes, then, unless the fence has been mended."

"Nor of the does, sir. Well, of course that

frights the things a bit, not knowing of her as they knows me—"

"Well?"

"Well, sir, that be all."

"It doesn't seem to me to be so very alarming. Why don't you speak to her, or to Miss Clare? I suppose she's not a mill-hand, as you call her a young lady?"

"I'd ha' spoke to her pretty sharp, if she'd been that. And you see, sir, as how madam be rather put about, just now, what with the doctors and the 'lection lawyers: and then she don't like to be vexed with things; she'd say as 'twere my work to look after the does—"

"And after the young ladies?"

"Yes, sir. And I didn't like to speak to the young lady without just asking a word—she might be a town lady, sir; and, as 'lection time be nigh—"

Hugh laughed. "I see," he said: "go on."

"It might get set about, sir, as how one of madam's men had unbehaved to a Denethorp lady, and then madam might blow me up for it. And so I thought as I'd best wait till you was come down, sir; for, says I, if any body knows what to do in a case, it be just Mr. Hugh."

"I don't know about that, Roberts. Young ladies are sometimes hard cases to tackle. But you have done quite rightly. What does she do in the Lodge Park? Walk there? I should have thought she could have found a better place for a morning walk than there, especially as she has to scramble over the rails. Is she young, did you say?"

"She be youngish; but I don't think she have got a sweetheart—I'd ha' soon spoke up to *him*."

"I've no doubt you would."

"And what she does, sir, I can't say, as I can't make out, like."

"What time does she go?"

"Early, sir—about seven, most days; some days before."

"Well, Roberts, you have done quite right in waiting to see me. I'd best speak myself to my aunt—or, better still, to the young lady herself—why not? I'll get up to-morrow on purpose. Where does she get over?"

"Just by the big beech, sir."

"I know. You'll just keep out of the way—"

"All right, Mr. Hugh."

"And, if she comes, I'll manage matters."

"Take care if she be a Denethorp lady, sir."

"All right. I shall certainly take care not to offend the most influential half of my future constituents. By Jove! I'll remember that: it'll make a capital tag to a speech. Prescot himself couldn't have put it better."

"And the does, Mr. Hugh?"

"Shall be driven no more."

"Thank you, sir. And I hope I did right, sir?"

"Quite. You have shown yourself to be a man of both gallantry and discretion."

"Yes, sir. Is there any thing I can do?"

"No, I don't think there is. By-the-way, I think of trying for a trout or two to-morrow, after I've been over in the town. Perhaps young Mr. Warden might come over. How's the brook?"

"First-rate, sir."

"Then come to me before breakfast to-morrow, and we'll talk about it. Well," continued Hugh to himself, "if I'm to take Roberts's place

in watching the does to-morrow morning, and have to be at the big beech by seven—by Jove! It sounds like a *rendezvous*. I must turn in forthwith."

But he did not turn in forthwith; for he lighted another cigar, and did not leave the terrace for a good hour longer. If Miss Raymond could have read his thoughts just then, she would have felt flattered: nor would he have been the reverse of flattered could he have read hers.

CHAPTER IV.

NEVERTHELESS, however much he may have thought about Miss Raymond and dreamed of her afterwards—supposing so admirable a sleeper to have dreamed about any thing at all—he was not a little amused and interested by his prospective adventure, slight as it was; and he rose in excellent time for arriving at the great beech by seven o'clock.

Before getting up, however, he took care to learn what sort of weather it was, with a strong hope that it would prove to be raining cats and dogs, or at least that it would be such as to furnish him with an excuse for putting off the matter to another day; for early rising was not one of his habits, particularly after a journey. However, he was doomed to disappointment. The sun was shining brightly, and the air was both fresh and warm. So he turned out heroically, and found himself all the better for having made the exertion.

But, setting aside the difficulties of getting out of bed, there are many other things that seem easy enough the night before, but wear a very different aspect next morning when they have actually to be done. Last night the matter seemed trivial and easy enough; but, in cold blood, and before breakfast too, to have to tell a young lady that she is trespassing and to warn her off, was not an agreeable errand for one who had begun to pique himself upon his politeness to women. Hugh hoped, in that corner of his heart where, in spite of his easy manners, he still hoarded a plentiful stock of shyness, that the young lady might prove to be neither a lady nor young. That she might turn out to be pretty he neither hoped nor feared. He did not hope it, because Denethorp was by no means rich in pretty girls at that period of its history; and his shyness was certainly not so great as to make him afraid of looking at a pretty face. He ran over in his mind the whole list of people in which the mysterious trespasser could possibly be included. Not the parson's wife, or any of his daughters—they were not likely to be walking all the way to Earl's Dene—a distance of full four miles—to gather dew in solitude. Nor for that matter were the wives or daughters of any one in Denethorp with whom he was in the least acquainted. So he was driven to conclude that it must be some tradesman's daughter who had caught some of the prevailing taste of the day for sentimental eccentricity, or else had formed exaggerated ideas as to the value of the morning air as a cosmetic. The notion that she might meet a lover there he dismissed from his mind at once; for however women may be constituted in such matters, reason and experience alike told him that to suppose for a mo-

ment that any man could possibly be so much in love as to get up at six o'clock morning after morning to carry on a courtship in the long damp grass of the Lodge Park, with the certainty of catching cold and the strong chance of being punished as a trespasser, was to suppose a gross absurdity. So, at least, he thought in his youthful cynicism. A better reason for his conclusion was, that Roberts, whose eyes were pretty sharp, had been of the same opinion.

In order therefore to satisfy his curiosity before proceeding to action, he took up a position from which, without being himself seen, he had a clear view of the great beech, whose arms, spreading well over the paling of the Lodge Park, afforded a favorite shelter for the persecuted dees.

He had not long to wait. Scarcely had he lighted a cigar, when, sure enough, he saw approaching along the line of trees that led from the main avenue to the beech in which they ended, a figure which was as plainly young as it was that of a lady. He had a full view of her very soon, and plenty of time to observe her as she came towards the tree.

What he saw was nothing very much, after all. It was only a small, slight figure, dressed in dark stuff, the color of which matched a complexion into which the morning air and exercise had brought a little more freshness than was apparently habitual to it; a face remarkable for little but a thoughtful but pleasant smile; and brown hair gathered away under a shabby hat. She carried something in her hand that looked like a book.

Hugh waited until she reached the tree, and, raising herself lightly and gracefully upon a swelling of the round bole near the root, had shown an evident intention of placing the paling between herself and the turf of the avenue. Then, thinking it high time to enter upon the scene before she had succeeded in placing herself in the awkward position of being caught in the very act of climbing over—awkward not only morally but physically—and politely denying himself the chance of thus seeing the turn of her ankle—he left his place of half-concealment, and, advancing towards her in such a manner as not to take her by surprise, he raised his hat, threw away his cigar, and said, stupidly enough—for, having made up his mind as he came along as to what he ought to say, he of course did not say it,

"I am exceedingly sorry—but—Miss Clare is very particular about the deer not being driven; and so—just now—"

The culprit, thus caught red-handed, as it were, turned round suddenly; and finding herself addressed by one who was so evidently a gentleman as Hugh Lester, and who was so evidently desirous, if he only knew how, of treating her politely, blushed slightly, as she answered—forgetting, however, to step down again upon the turf—in an accent that was neither of Denethorp nor of any place in England,

"Am I doing wrong, sir?"

The "sir" grated upon his ears a little; it was not as "good style" as the rest of her manner and appearance. But the voice in which the objectionable word had been uttered was altogether superior to style.

"Oh, not at all; but, as I said, my aunt—Miss Clare, that is—is very particular about not allowing any one in the Lodge Park; and though

I have no doubt she would make an exception in your case, still, you understand—at least, I hope you see—that—I am very sorry to have interrupted your walk." Lame and impotent conclusion!

The Lady, naïvely.—"I am very sorry too; but if Miss Clare does not permit it, of course I must not go there. Of course I did not know I was doing wrong."

Lester.—"Nor were you—that is—but, after all, the Lodge Park is not the pleasantest part of the place, and there can be no objection to your going everywhere else as much and as often as you please. And so I have not confined your walk so very much. I hope you will not let me think I have offended you by avoiding Earl's Dene, or I should be sorry indeed."

The Lady, rather stiffly.—"Thank you. You are very kind, and I am certainly not offended."

Lester, seeing that he had made a blunder in the form of his last speech.—"I am glad of that. I was afraid you might think you had not been treated very courteously."

The Lady, descending from her perch, and after a short pause, during which she had been considering.—"Pray do not mention it. It is I who ought to apologize. But as I have been here a good many mornings now, of course I thought there was no harm."

Another pause. Then,—

The Lady, with a sudden frankness, and as though her mind was quite made up.—"I should only have come once or twice more."

Lester.—"Might I ask if you have any special purpose, then, for wishing to come here? If so, no doubt Miss Clare would give you permission willingly."

The Lady.—"Yes; and I should certainly like to be able to come once or twice again." Lester waited for her to explain. "In fact it was the deer that tempted me."

Lester, mystified.—"The deer?"

The Lady.—"Yes; to study them."

Lester.—"Ah, I see. You are an artist, then?"

The Lady.—"I am a learner."

Lester.—"Then I beg your pardon more than ever. I know Miss Clare would be only too happy to let you sketch her deer."

The Lady, evidently not intending to let her chance slip.—"I should be so glad! But she might not like it; and—"

Lester.—"Oh, she would be sure to make no objection. On the contrary, she would feel flattered. But I can not give you leave myself. I must speak to her first—"

The Lady.—"Of course. But I hope you will not put yourself to any trouble on my account—"

Lester.—"It would be no trouble at all. How could it be? Let me see—I will speak to Miss Clare to-day; but how can I let you know her answer? But it would be sure to be all right; and you could come here to-morrow, if you like, very safely."

The Lady.—"I should not like to, without knowing."

Lester, struck by a good thought.—"Then she or I could write you a note. You would get it to-day, if you live at Denethorp, as I suppose you do; so, if you would tell me your address—"

The Lady, gratefully.—"You are most kind indeed, sir, and I should be ashamed to trouble

you or Miss Clare so much as that; and, as it is, I am ashamed of seeming so persistent about what you must, I'm sure, think a mere caprice."

Lester.—"What trouble could it possibly be? If you will tell me your address I shall remember it."

The Lady.—"Then, as you are so kind—Miss Lefort, 23 Market Street."

Lester.—"Thanks. You shall hear to-day, or to-morrow at furthest. Meanwhile I will take it upon myself to ask you to finish your sketch this morning."

The Lady.—"Thanks, indeed; but I could not think of such a thing."

Lester.—"But why not? surely—"

The Lady, resolutely.—"I would rather not now, indeed. I would much rather wait till I can come with Miss Clare's permission."

Lester.—"I am afraid you are angry with me?"

The Lady, very coldly.—"Not at all—why should I be?"

Lester.—"For having interrupted your studies for a whole morning. And the least I can do—"

The Lady, with a smile.—"I dare say you have not done my studies very much harm."

Lester.—"But I can not allow you to have had your long walk for nothing. I must really ask you to remain this morning, if only to set my conscience at ease."

The Lady.—"But I do not consider that I have had my walk for nothing, by any means. To meet with kindness surely can not be called nothing. But indeed I would very much rather put off my sketch till another time."

Lester, seeing that she did not intend to be persuaded.—"Then, since you will not do me this kindness, I will see that it shall be finished as soon as possible. But I am sorry—I wish I could persuade you to remain."

The Lady.—"You are most kind indeed. It is I that ought to be sorry."

Lester, not liking to press her further.—"You have no occasion to be, I assure you. By the way, Miss Lefort, if I might ask you, are you living in Denethorp? If you are visiting I may very likely know something of your friends."

The Lady.—"We have been many years in Denethorp. My father is a teacher of French."

Lester.—"Oh, I think I have heard of him. I hope that he finds the place suit him, and that he has no want of pupils?"

The Lady.—"Oh, he does well enough. But now I must wish you good-morning, and thank you once more."

She made him a grave bow, which Lester answered by raising his hat, and was gone. He wished that he had been able to persuade her to remain, and failing in this, would have willingly invented an excuse for seeing her as far as the great gates: but as that, to judge from her manner, was wholly out of the question, he lighted another cigar, and, with a good appetite for breakfast, strolled quietly back to the house.

On reaching the garden he met Miss Raymond.

"Why, what an early riser you are!" she said.

"Not in general, I am afraid."

"So I hear you are going into Parliament?"

"My aunt has told you? Yes, if I win."

"Of course you will win."

"Perhaps I shall if you canvass for me. Prescott, they say, turns the heads of all the women; but if you appear in the field I shall have one on my side worth a host."

"But suppose Mr. Prescott turned mine with the others?"

"Then I should at once retire from the contest. The election would be virtually decided. Will my aunt be down to breakfast?"

"She is down."

"Already? Is it so late? By Jove, so it is!"

"Do you call this late—you, a Londoner?"

"I meant I did not know I had been out so long. I have been having a *rendezvous* with a young lady, you must know."

"With a young lady?"

"It is quite true, I assure you. I arranged it last night before I went to bed."

"You certainly make good use of your time. But what do you mean?"

"I have spoken the exact truth."

"Nonsense. Come in to breakfast—that will be more amiable than asking riddles. Miss Clare has been down this half-hour."

"I will come, then, since you lead. And you shall hear my confession."

At the breakfast-table he gave a lively account of his adventure, much to Miss Raymond's amusement; but, when he mentioned the name Lefort,

"Why, surely," she said, "it can't be Angélique?"

"And who is Angélique?"

"Oh, my friend—my travelling companion. She is staying with her friends, while I am staying with mine. Oh, I dare say it is her cousin—she has one. By-the-way, Miss Clare, I ought to call on the Leforts. They were old *protégés* of my dear mother. Could I, do you think?"

"Oh, certainly, if you wish it."

"That will be capital," said Hugh. "I am going to drive over to Denethorp after breakfast to see White. If you like to trust yourself with me, you can see your friends while I am doing my talk. White will keep me some time, I dare say."

"Oh, that would be delightful! I should so like the drive, but—"

But Miss Clare made no objection, and so the arrangement was made.

CHAPTER V.

LEAVING Hugh Lester to the enjoyment of his well-earned breakfast, Miss Lefort, when he parted from her, walked quickly but quietly along the avenue towards the lodge, naturally rather flurried by her unexpected interruption, and yet rather pleased at it too; something in the same way as a child may feel pleased by the excitement of having been caught in a piece of mischief, scolded, and forgiven. She had liked the manner of her new acquaintance, and felt even flattered by his evident care to be polite to her under difficulties. In short, she had been any thing but offended by her morning's adventure. In this mood she traversed the long three miles of dusty highroad leading to the town, and then, passing the few villas and orna-

mental cottages, the exact reverse of ornamental, that showed Denethorp to be what builders call an improving place, and a narrow old-fashioned street or two, in which still remained not a few houses with the projecting stories and pointed roofs of centuries ago, stopped before a boot-maker's shop that bore the number, 23. The shutters were not yet taken down, nor was the shop-door open; but, at the side entrance, a shabby, red-armed servant-girl was producing a miniature and muddy flood by scrubbing and mopping the rough pavement in front of it. Stepping as well as she could over the barricade of mops and pails, Miss Lefort made her way up a dark and dusky staircase, smelling of close windows, to the second floor.

The room which Miss Lefort entered was in the front of the house, and looked out upon the narrow Market Street; that is to say, upon a double row of second and third-rate shops, principally patronized by the small farmers of the neighborhood who drove into town on Thursday—Denethorp market-day—and looked down upon by the wives and daughters of the mill-owners, lawyers, doctors, and parsons, who composed the aristocracy and plutocracy of the place, and who, for the most part, did their shopping at Redchester. It was therefore for six days out of the seven rather excessively quiet, not to say dull; and, on the seventh, very much too noisy. This particular room in No. 23 was not of a character in itself to mitigate the effect of the external dullness that reigned from Friday to Wednesday; and as its windows commanded the whole length of the street, it had the full benefit of the one day of bustle. It was small, and poorly furnished in what may be called for the occasion, after the same manner as that in which one speaks of the style *Pompadour* or *Louis XIV.*, or *de la Renaissance*, the style *crinière*, or horse-hair style—a style too well-known and too unvarying even in its minutest details to require special description. There are few so fortunate as never to have met with it once; and whoever has seen one specimen knows as much about it as if he had seen a hundred. The occupants of the room, however, had more individuality than the chairs on which they had to sit—a remark that can not be made of all occupants of all rooms, even when the latter are not furnished in the horse-hair mode.

The group which they formed consisted of two young children—a boy and a girl of about nine and seven years old respectively, who were romping noisily upon the hearth-rug in a manner that would have horrified all believers in the virtue of clean clothes; a man of about fifty-five at the least, or of seventy at the most, short, thin, narrow-chested, pale, stooping, bald, with meagre sharp features, a yellow complexion, and long and lean but delicate hands, shabbily dressed and unmistakably a foreigner, who was drinking coffee at the table; and a girl, or rather young woman, who was engaged in reading a letter at the window.

She was like Miss Lefort, and yet not like her at the same time; that is to say, there was a vague and general resemblance between the two in an altogether indefinable way, and a wide dissimilarity between them in all matters of detail.

Now there are three ways of describing the appearance of a beautiful woman. One is to treat

her passport-fashion—*Height*, five feet so many inches; *age*, five-and-twenty, more or less; *figure*, slight and undulating; *complexion*, brown and pale; *hair*, dark brown; *eyes*, the same—large, soft, and tender; *nose*, straight; and so on. This, of course, is an accurate way; but it has the defect of never producing any thing better than a common form applicable to many hundreds. It is easy enough to make a catalogue of good points; but it is not by a mere series of good points that any idea of beauty is expressed to the mind. Another way is to adopt the laudatory style, and to say, as might justly be said in this case, that she was of exactly the right height for her style of figure and of exactly the right style of figure for her height, and that she carried both with grace; that her autumnal complexion combined the merits of the *brunette* and of the *blonde*; and that, beautiful as she was in all respects, her greatest wealth of beauty was in her eyes. Yet another way is the poetical or metaphorical; but then that is always open to the objection that to say what a thing is like is very different indeed from saying what it really is. Such an image, for instance, as that of a harvest-moon shining against all rule in a night of May upon a garden of pale hyacinths, which had indeed bowed their heads but had forgotten to close their bells when the sun went down, would be absolutely out of place in the sober prose of common life, however useful it might have proved to any lover of this girl's who happened to have a knack of rhyming.

These are about the only three ways; and, perhaps, if any one should take the trouble to combine what has been said under the head of each method, he might succeed in producing an imaginary portrait not wildly unlike the original.

But it is an unfortunate and lamentable fact that, while it is difficult, if not impossible, to praise intelligibly, to find fault and point out defects intelligibly is the easiest thing in the world. While it requires something approaching to genius to make a complimentary speech about any man that does not sound like sarcasm or drivel, it does not require that a man should be a Demosthenes to deliver, without going beyond the truth, a telling philippic against even the best and the wisest. To descend, then, from general to particular cases, beautiful as this woman undoubtedly was, it is far easier to point out her faults of appearance than to describe her merits.

There was first, then, a want of that harmony about her by which many women who are plain of feature are rendered almost if not quite beautiful. The moon of September in a night of spring, the flower remaining open after sunset, are images that may suggest beauty but certainly do not suggest harmony or repose. Then her admirably-shaped mouth was of the smallest: a doubtful merit as regards beauty of feature, and always a positive fault as regards beauty of expression. Then, too, the grace of her carriage was plainly a little studied; unnecessarily so, for it was graceful enough by nature, and probably less languid than she made it seem. Again, her forehead lacked both height and breadth without being more than commonly well formed. Her delicate hand, moreover, wanted the plumpness that a young hand ought to have, thus telling either of ill-health, present or to come, or else of excess of nervous excitability. But, after all, these were all but

spots on the sun. She seemed to be a few years younger than Miss Lefort in point of figure; but in point of expression, which is a far better test, she looked decidedly the elder.

When Miss Lefort entered the room, all looked up suddenly as though she had not been expected; and the two children ran up to her and seized her hands and dress. In striking contrast to her who has been last described, her figure was without languor, and her complexion had been freshened by the morning air, so that if she was far less beautiful she was certainly not less pleasant to look upon.

Monsieur Lefort.—"Good-morning, Marie. You are back soon."

Marie.—"Good-morning, father. Ah, Angélique, you should have been with me this morning."

Angélique, folding her letter, and a little languidly.—"And why this morning in particular?"

They all spoke in French; but her voice was of a kind to render almost too musical that most unmusical of languages. But even her voice, too, had a fault—it wanted fullness.

Marie.—"Because you have lost an adventure. You see what comes of being an early bird."

Angélique, exerting herself.—"But I don't like worms, dear Marie; I prefer coffee. I hope, though, that yours was a nice fat one?"

Marie.—"Hm! that depends."

Ernest and Fleurette.—"Tell us, Marie! And have you made any more pictures?"

Marie, giving them her sketch-book.—"There—see what I have done."

Ernest.—"Why, it is all empty."

Marie.—"That is an end of the story, then. But I see, Angélique, that you have had your worm as well, and without the trouble of going out to look for it. What is it? A letter? Why, that is an event! What is it? Who is it from?"

Angélique.—"From Felix. He is in England."

Marie.—"Felix in England? You are joking, surely."

Angélique, looking through her eyelashes.—"Is it, then, so strange that he should come to England?"

Marie, going up to and embracing her.—"Not the least; not at all! How I should like to see him! But I am sure he can not be good enough. If he is not the handsomest and cleverest man in the world I assure you that I have made up my mind to hate him. Are you not afraid?"

Angélique, looking at the children.—"Hush, dear Marie."

Marie.—"But does he tell you nothing? You always are saying, you know, that I only care about facts. Is he well?"

Ernest and Fleurette.—"But the story, Marie!"

Angélique.—"He is quite well; and there are no facts, indeed."

Marie.—"Oh, well, I will have patience, especially as I am hungry; for my worm was not very satisfying—not half so interesting as yours, after all."

Ernest and Fleurette, vociferously.—"The story!"

Marie.—"My dear children, I am dying with hunger. Get me the butter, Ernest, and you the bread, Fleurette, or I shall have to eat my story

instead, and then there will be none of it left for you. Fancy Felix being in England! Can you not tell me any thing out of the letter, just to relish the *tartines*? there's a dear girl!"

Angélique.—"There is nothing that will not keep."

Marie.—"Then I must put an extra lump of sugar in my coffee, to make up. Have you any news, father?"

M. Lefort.—"None that is good."

Marie.—"I hope there is nothing wrong?"

M. Lefort.—"No. I only mean that every day that passes without a letter makes things seem more doubtful. Of course I know that they must have their hands full—but what then? Ah! I remember forty years ago—"

Marie.—"But no news is good news, they say. As for myself, I don't expect to hear till all is settled. Why should any one trouble to write before?"

M. Lefort.—"Well a man who has waited thirty years can afford to wait thirty-one, I suppose. And so we must be patient—that's all."

Marie.—"And hope."

M. Lefort.—"Ah! you are young. I did so once. But now you will have to hope for us both, if you speak of hope."

Marie.—"But, seriously, dear father, why should we not all hope? Even if the worst comes to the worst, and nothing can be done for us, what have we really to fear? Are we not happy as we are? Should we be happier for a change? We should be no richer than now, and you would have to work just as hard. Should we even be as rich as we shall be in England? Angélique must be a great singer one day; and am I too stupid to teach notes and scales?"

M. Lefort, smiling in spite of himself.—"Conceited girl!"

Marie.—"I thought you would agree with me. Oh, I believe in myself immensely, and am not a bit afraid for any of us. That was very good coffee indeed. Who made it?"

Fleurette.—"I did."

Marie.—"Then I believe in you most of all, and I will tell you the story."

Ernest.—"And me?"

Marie.—"You may listen. Well once upon a time there lived a princess—"

Ernest.—"Who was beautiful, of course."

Marie.—"No, not at all. But she was very fond of beautiful things and beautiful creatures—perhaps for that very reason—and so one day she set out to look for them all over the world. First of all, she looked in her own looking-glass, but that wouldn't do."

Fleurette.—"Why not?"

Marie.—"Because hers was a glass that always told the truth. So then—"

Ernest.—"What was her name?"

Marie.—"She had none. Then she looked out at window, but she saw nothing but people who were nearly as ugly as herself. At last, however, she heard of a country a very long way off indeed—four miles at least—where there lived a queen; and as she heard that it was full of beautiful things, she set out at once to find it."

Fleurette.—"All by herself?"

Marie.—"All by herself. That is the only way to find out beautiful things."

Fleurette.—"And wasn't she afraid?"

Marie.—"I'm not sure she wasn't a little,

just at first. Well, she left the palace where the king her father, and the prince her brother, and the princess her sister, and the princess her cousin all lived together, and walked on and on and on along a dusty road, until she didn't feel quite sure about her way. At last she didn't know which way to turn; but she saw that one looked prettier than another, and so she took it. Well, the road got prettier and prettier every step she took until she came to a white cottage built of stone and covered with leaves, with an old witch sitting at the door nursing a black cat."

Fleurette.—"And then wasn't she frightened?"

Marie.—"Anyhow she was bold enough to ask the old witch, 'Is this the queen's country?' And the witch pointed with her crutch to a gate, and said, 'If you go through there, and then turn to the right, and keep straight on, you'll come to the avenue'—just as though she was not a witch at all, but only a common old woman."

Ernest.—"Perhaps that's what she was."

Marie.—"You know nothing about it. Then the princess said 'Thank you,' and walked along the avenue till she looked over some palings and saw the most beautiful creatures."

Fleurette.—"What were they like? Birds?"

Marie.—"No; they had four legs, and large black eyes, and some were dappled, and some white, and some black, and some gray. And the princess said, 'Oh, if I could only find out what makes these creatures so beautiful!'"

Ernest.—"She ought to have caught them."

Marie.—"She wandered about, and went every day to look at the creatures. Then she thought she would make some pictures of them, and at last, just as she was beginning to find out their true secret—"

Fleurette.—"What?"

Marie.—"She suddenly heard a voice exclaim, 'Who is that in my park-paling?'"

Ernest.—"Who was it! The queen?"

Marie.—"No, it was a prince, the heir to the throne. He looked very fierce indeed, and had a cigar in his mouth."

Ernest.—"But princes in stories never used to smoke cigars."

Marie.—"No; but they do now. Then the princess got very frightened, and fell on her knees and begged for mercy."

Fleurette.—"And did he kill her?"

Marie.—"No; he took pity on the princess; but said that the queen, his aunt, would certainly have her put to death. But he said he would ask the queen to forgive her if she would promise not to frighten the beautiful creatures again, as it seems she had done. So you see she had been rightly punished by being frightened herself."

Fleurette.—"And did the queen pardon her?"

The red-armed Servant, after tapping at the door.—"A note for you, miss."

Marie, eagerly.—"For me? From whom?"

The Servant, with an air of awe.—"Brought by a young man, miss, a groom up at Earl's Dene. He said there was no answer."

M. Lefort.—"From Earl's Dene!"

Marie, after passing through a slight cloud of disappointment.—"There, *Angélique*! I have letters as well as you! The queen sent her this letter:

"'DEAR PRINCESS,—No, it was the prince sent it.—'Dear Princess,—Her Majesty has much pleasure in giving you permission to use the Lodge Park at any time you please, and also hopes to have the further pleasure of seeing the result. I promised her to add that she would rather you did not enter the Lodge Park at the great beech, as it disturbs the deer, but through the gate on the other side. They will tell you the way to it at the lodge."

"'Hoping you will consider this some amends for the rudeness of which, I fear, you must have thought me guilty this morning, I am yours most truly,
HUGH LESTER."

"'As Mr. Lefort lives in Denethorp, I trust you will not think that Miss Clare's permission applies to yourself only. The keepers will have orders accordingly.'"

M. Lefort, having looked at the note.—"This is very polite indeed. Why, *Marie*, this looks very like a real adventure."

Marie.—"And a pleasant one, is it not?"

Angélique.—"What sort of person is this Mr. Lester?"

Ernest, slyly.—"And will the prince marry the princess?"

Fleurette.—"And shall we all go and see the beautiful creatures?"

Marie.—"I don't know any thing more about it."

CHAPTER VI.

CERTAINLY the new Fellow of St. Margaret's might consider that he had made the most of himself, so far. It was not only that he had succeeded, but his success had been entirely owing to his own exertion; and in such a case a little self-glorification is not unbecoming. Unlike most men, he was not forced to think how differently he would act were it in his power to begin his university life over again. He had not run into debt; he had formed no social habits that require an expenditure of time or money; he had not even wasted himself in conversation, intellectual speculation, or desultory reading. As he had been at school, such was he in his freshman's year, and such he remained until he put on his bachelor's hood. From the very first day of his taking possession of his attic in St. Margaret's College he devoted himself entirely to the orthodox work of the place, in his pursuit of which he never allowed himself to be disturbed by any kind of distraction whatever. Moreover, every day with him meant work—work conscious and actual; and his power of realizing the immediate end to be attained, and of adopting and carrying out the right means to attain it, was so strong that he can scarcely be said to have exercised any real self-denial in the course which he pursued. Spurred on by his special form of ambition, or rather by what stood in the place of ambition, he showed what may be done by a student without genius, without the incentive afforded by a sense of duty, and without enthusiasm, or love of learning for its own sake. Had the rewards of his university been bestowed for proficiency in billiards, to billiards he would have devoted himself with equal zeal; and it was in precisely the same spirit that he devoted himself to

Greek and mathematics. As may well be supposed, he was not very popular among the men of his own standing, and made but few acquaintances; but he made himself respected, and he valued college popularity at its true worth—which is very little. While far abler men than himself were living according to the number of their years, this old head upon young shoulders was exemplifying the fable of the hare and the tortoise.

Not a remarkably amiable character this, but certainly not weak or contemptible. Such men do not often achieve greatness, but success they can scarcely help achieving. In the result, at the end of his three years Warden was, on the whole, beaten by only two men in his year: in mathematics, by a man who, young as he was, loved science with the unselfish and all-absorbing love that she demands from her lovers; and in classics, by a strange sort of ruffian who was drunk five days in the week, who slept all the sixth, and who then on the seventh, when he was awake and sober, laughed over Aristophanes till he was drunk again, but who spouted Anacreon over his cups, and dreamed of Greek roots in iambic trimeters. But, barring the enthusiast and the genius, the practical man, who simply read hard to secure his fellowship, was in front of the field. And he had his reward: for while he sat in ease and comfort at the high table of St. Margaret's, the senior wrangler was dying of consumption; and the constitution of his other rival, originally as strong as that of a hundred horses, had begun to yield to the inevitable Nemesis of drink, after its possessor had come to grief with the authorities on account of some Greek epigrams which had displayed a great deal more wit and scholarship than reverence or decency.

And now Mark Warden, to whom Aristophanes was only so much matter to be "read"—to use the word in its undergraduate sense—to whom the stars might have been bits of tinfoil for any thing he cared, and who, for reasons that Marie could have told, had no right to sit at the high table at all, returned to his father's house as it were in a halo of triumph. When he reached it, the street-door was standing open, so that he had no need to knock or ring in order to pass through the entrance-hall into a small parlor—how small it seemed to him now!—in which a suggestion of wall-flowers unnaturally strove with a decided perfume of tobacco and hot spirits. It was furnished in a more home-like style than the room in Market Street, and yet, somehow, it did not look so much like home. The effect of it upon Mark was even rather chilling. His college rooms were by no means extravagantly sumptuous or unnecessarily comfortable, but they had the advantage of the comparison; and then it must be remembered that he had been a little put out of temper with himself and his belongings towards the end of his journey. And then this was no longer really his home. He had risen above the family level, and its ways were no longer his ways nor its thoughts his thoughts. And then the old scene suggested memories to him that three years of work and absence had naturally not a little clouded; and although they had been very bearable to him while they did not affect his daily life, they began to look formidable now that he was in the very midst of them again.

The parlor was empty of all save the greasy leather chair, the scratched and bruised mahoga-

ny table, the worn-out carpet, the dusty corner-cupboard, and all the other articles of furniture that he had once accepted as part of the nature of things, but which now looked to him so wretchedly mean and shabby. He was about to pull the bell-rope to announce his arrival, when a maid-servant, not over neat or clean, considering the lateness of the hour, and who, to judge from the redness of her bared arms, in which she supported a tray, might have been own sister to her of Market Street, as indeed very likely she was, put her head in at the door, and then, overcome by either fear or modesty at the sight of a strange gentleman, gave a scream and let the tray with its contents—fortunately not fragile—clatter upon the floor.

"Is my father at home?" asked Mark, a little crossly, for such a welcome as this jarred upon his nerves.

"Why, save us! it's Master Mark. Lord, sir, how you be growed out of sight! You give one quite a turn."

"I was expected, was I not?"

"Well, Master M—, sir, I did hear something. But master, he've dined—"

"Oh, I didn't mean that. Is he in? or my sister?"

"Master's in the surg'ry. And Miss Lorry—I'll go and fetch her."

And this was the triumphant return!

Presently, however, down ran Miss Lorry—beaming, gushing, rosy, and untidy. "Oh, Mark," she cried, throwing herself upon him with a rush, "we'd quite given you up! How hungry you must be!" was it his fancy only that she said *ungr*y?—"But I'm so glad! Did you come all the way from Cambridge to-day?"—This was not likely, seeing that the journey was over two hundred miles.—"Only think! why, I shouldn't have known you! I *am* so glad!" And, to do her justice, she looked as pleased as she said she was.

"It is a long time, isn't it? and my father?"

"Oh, he's all right; Jane is gone to tell him. He'll be here directly. Oh, I *am* so sorry! We had dinner at one. I wonder is there any thing in the house! Oh, of course—there's the mutton; I dare say it's got cold now. Or it might be warmed, mightn't it?—Oh, here's papa. I thought he wouldn't be long."

And so in came Mr. Warden from the surgery—tall, big, loose, florid, loud-mannered and loud-voiced as ever, or rather more than ever, bringing with him a jovial smile, and an atmosphere that showed that if Lorry had been answerable for the scent of the wall-flowers, he was responsible for the other part of the odor of the room.

"Ah, Mark, my boy—delighted to see you! So here you are back again with three hundred a year all of your own! Who'd have thought it? Ah, college is a fine thing. Fancy a boy of mine making money! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've had to work for it, though."

"Well, well; that's all the better, isn't it? Every body ought to put his shoulder to the wheel—that's my maxim. But all work and no play, you know. So now you've come to idle a bit, hey?"

"And how are things with you, father?"

"Oh, slack—slack. But we rub on, Lorry and me. One might do something, if it weren't

for that damned fool Jones. I was in consultation with him to-day. He's got in with madam, you know—and much good he'll do her. 'Pon my honor, I don't believe he knows the liver from the stomach; and as for his *diagnosis*—pooh!"

By this time the mutton made its appearance upon the same unfortunate tray. It was both red and tepid; but hunger, though used to look for its satisfaction to the high table of St. Margaret's, is still hunger, and Mark had not grown too dainty to be superior to the effects of a long day spent on the roof of a coach. Besides, the air of Denethorp is not much less appetizing than that of Cambridge itself, which is notorious in that respect. And so, though his eyes revolted, he attacked the joint not unwillingly.

"You mentioned Miss Clare," he said, after a few minutes of silence, during which Lorry sat staring at him with all her eyes, and his father ruminated over the sins of Jones. "I travelled with her nephew from Redchester."

"Ah, young Lester? Not a bad fellow that. Set a collar-bone for him once, out with the hounds, when he wasn't that high. He's tall enough now. Lucky dog he is. By-the-way, there's to be a fight."

"A fight?"

"Yes, for Johnston's seat; and he'll be beat too. You're just in time to see the fun."

"And who's going to stand, then?" Politics had not been in Mark's line, and so he only asked the question for the sake of saying something.

"Oh, a man named Prescott—another lucky dog, and an out-and-outer—reformer, you know, and that. Speaks just like a what's-his-name, and in with all the mill people. He canvassed me the other day. I'd half a mind to promise for him, just to go against that ass Jones."

"But you couldn't do that very well."

"Couldn't I, though? And I would have too, only then there's that other ass young Smith, who's got hold of that lot. What they can see in him Lord knows. Why, he isn't as old as you are. Jones don't know a liver from a stomach, but Smith don't know man from mutton. No, no. I must vote for Church and King—Church and King, you know—if it was only to put down young Smith. 'Confound their politics, frustrate their knavish tricks!' Now, Lorry, just get out the tumblers, there's a girl, and the brandy. I'm going to have a pipe."

His son did not smoke, nor did he drink spirits, whatever taste he, as a college fellow, had managed to acquire for the nobler port. So he sat unoccupied while his father filled the long clay pipe, of the kind known to connoisseurs as a "churchwarden," and mixed himself a pretty stiff tumbler.

"And now we're comfortable and all at home again," said the latter. "Why, bless my soul, Lorry, you haven't had that window mended yet! We don't want that sort of draught—ha, ha, ha! And now, Mark, my boy, what's next?"

"Next?"

"Yes—when you're going in to be a bishop, you know?"

"I'm not at all sure I shall go into the Church at all."

"What is it to be, then?"

"I think I shall go to London and read for the bar. I've got my fellowship to keep me *meanwhile*, you know."

"Read for the bar! Bless my heart and soul!" Let it be remembered that to be a barrister was in itself something of a distinction in those days, whatever it may be in these.

"Why not? It seems my best way of doing something in the world."

"Well, you know best, no doubt—you know best. Only be any thing but a doctor, that's all I say."

"La, Mark," said Lorry; "what, like the people when the judge comes in at Redchester? And shall you have to wear a wig?"

Any reply that her brother might have been going to make to these appreciative remarks was interrupted by the arrival of one of the friends of the house—a managing clerk to one of the Denethorp attorneys, who, like his master in the old times, occasionally used to drop in of an evening to smoke a pipe with the doctor. He was rather a smart fellow in his way, and was publicly supposed to have half an eye upon Miss Lorry—perhaps he would have bestowed the other half also upon her had her fortune been equal to her merit.

"Ah, Brown," said Mr. Warden, "sit down, my boy. Mr. Brown—my son from Cambridge." The two bowed to each other—Mr. Brown genially, Mark stiffly. "And how are things going, Brown?" continued the doctor. "What's the news?"

Mr. Brown was certainly not "good style," and Mark had of late grown marvellously particular about such things. Besides, he had but just parted from Lester, whose style was undeniable. And so he did not go through his part of the introduction with a very good grace.

"Miss Warden," said the other, "delighted to see you so blooming. Sir, delighted to make your acquaintance—proud indeed. Johnston's retired."

"What?" said the doctor; "madam going to throw up the sponge? You astonish me!"

"Sounds queer, doctor, don't it? But you don't know elections like I do. Between ourselves, you know, it'll turn out a dodge."

"To put Prescott's people off the scent?"

"Maybe. But any way it'll be a dodge. Catch madam asleep—catch a weasel! Not to speak of White & Son. And I will say that for them, that no one ever caught the office napping yet. And there's something up—that I know for certain. You know young Lester?"

"Of course."

"Well, between ourselves, you know, it's a fact he came down by coach this very day. What do you think of that? Put two and two together—eh? I heard it from Sparks, who sat behind him all the way from Redchester."

"And what's he to do?"

"Why stand! that's what he's to do. You take my word for it, madam means fighting; and I will say that for her, that when she means fighting she fights—and no mistake. But won't the money have to fly, that's all!"

"I wish some of it would fly my way," said the doctor, meditatively.

"It'll fly every way!" said Mr. Brown, triumphantly. "Denethorp hasn't had such a chance this many a day!"

CHAPTER VII.

It must have become pretty evident by this time that Mark Warden was sailing under false colors—that he had set out on the voyage of life in rather buccaneer fashion. He could not but own it, even to himself, distinctly and consciously.

And yet—what was he to do? Every thing had somehow or other seemed so plain and easy to him while he was at Cambridge. There, he had not been able, living as an unmarried man with other unmarried men, absorbed in the work of the place, with only himself to think of, to feel that he was not as others were. Marie had become a sort of dream to him; and so he felt, whenever he thought about the matter at all, that he must have become a sort of dream to Marie. Had he been an idle man, with nothing to do but write love-letters, things might have worn a different aspect to him. But when a strong man's heart is in his work, and when that work is purely selfish, he is seldom able to realize what concerns others. But now, once more in Denethorp, relieved from the iron of hard work, and in the midst of all the associations of three years ago, the image of Marie took a far more substantial form, and became any thing but a dream. Once more, what was he to do?

He might resign his fellowship, declare his marriage, and take a curacy and pupils. "Of course," the reader will say; "what else?" But then he would have thrown away the hopes, the labor, the success of years; he would condemn himself to an obscure and uncongenial life for the rest of his days; it would be far worse than committing suicide. No—any thing but that, he thought. And let not the reader be too sure, if he is not guided by some nobler principle than Mark Warden, that he, under similar circumstances, would not think in a similar way. And so, before he slept, he entered into a sort of compromise with himself. The marriage had been secret for three years—let it be secret for four; and then—who knows what might happen? It is not only weak-minded men who, when pushed into a moral difficulty, cast their burden upon the shoulders of Fortune.

Nevertheless it was in a frame of mind made up of doubt and of that sort of self-justification which is the surest symptom of unconscious shame that he, on rising, faced the fresh, honest breath of the morning, laden with the old-fashioned fragrance of the old-fashioned flowers of long ago. From the window of his room he saw his sister, with uncovered head, sleeves tucked up, and shoes down at heel, mysteriously engaged with a clothes-line which extended from one brick wall of the garden to the other; and the sight did not please him, for it suggested to him the vision of a future Mrs. Brown. Then he descended into the parlor, still strongly flavored with the effects of last evening. It was by no means early, but there were no signs of breakfast; indeed in that house nothing seemed to be done at any particular time or in any particular manner. Presently, however, his father came in; and then, somehow or other, breakfast and Lorry made their appearance together.

"Well, Mark," said the doctor, "what are you up to to-day? I wanted to have seen something of you; but there's always something or

another. I really must go and see that child of Wilkins's. I ought to have gone yesterday—only something put it out of my head; and—hang it! my boots weren't cleaned this morning. But never mind—they'll do for once in a way. But that reminds me—I promised to go and see what's his-name on Sunday. Well, well, I dare say it was nothing particular."

"Oh, never mind me. I shall just stroll about somewhere."

Laura looked knowingly at her brother; for though not a *confidante* of his great secret, she had not been blind to his great flirtation. "I think I can fancy where you'll stroll to," she said.

"And, Lorry," continued the doctor, "if Summers calls about that bill again, you know, tell him I haven't forgotten it, or something like that; and if any body else calls, say I shall be sure to be in some time or other. And you can have that window mended—only don't pay for it; and have in another bottle of brandy from the Chequers—I've got an account against them there of some sort or another, so it'll be all right. And now I must be off." And so he marched away heavily, munching his last mouthful of breakfast as he left the door.

Then Lorry in a few minutes was carried off by the red-armed maid, and Mark was left to follow his own devices.

His sister had proved to be a true prophetess. As, indeed, he was only bound in duty to do, he took himself slowly and uncomfortably to Market Street. The distance was not far, but he was a long time in traversing it; for now that his meeting with Marie was imminent and inevitable, his anxiety about it, and about the nature of the relation that must somehow or other be established between him and her, for the present almost tempted him to fly from the situation altogether. He almost began to doubt whether he, the precociously wise, had not been guilty of a great piece of folly for once in his life.

Chance also aided his feeble attempts to procrastinate—attempts of which, to do him justice, he was half ashamed. It was by no means a pleasant thing for him to feel that he, Mark Warden, Wrangler, Fellow, *et cætera, et cætera*, was afraid to meet Marie, who was Marie and nothing more. He would have sufficiently despised any other man who feared to meet a woman, and that woman his own wife. But for himself, he welcomed the chance that aided him, nevertheless.

At a smart trot along the High Street came a light trap, driven by his travelling companion of yesterday. Hugh Lester also saw Warden and pulled up.

"You're the very man I want to see, Warden!" he said. "What do you think? I'm going to stand for Denethorp."

"Indeed? But I heard something about it last night. I wish you a triumphant return with all my heart."

"Thanks, old fellow. But you must do something more than that. You've become a great man here, you know."

"I am sure I did not know it."

"I don't know what people don't think you've been doing. There seems a sort of impression that you've been made Archbishop of Canterbury. I've been having a little talk with White, you

know. I wish you'd come and see him, if you wouldn't mind."

"But what could I do?"

"Oh, lots of things. You see this is how things are, or something like it. You have heard, I suppose, that they want to turn us out?"

"But they won't, of course."

"Not if we can help it. But from what White says they seem to have got all the brains on their side and most of the money. Are you a good hand at talking—at spouting, I mean?"

"I never made a speech in my life."

"Never mind that. The fact is, White has been asking me about you, and I told him you could do every thing. So just come and see him, there's a good fellow. I shall be tremendously obliged."

"I should be delighted to be of any use, of course—if I thought I could be of any."

"Of course you can. You'll come and see White, then?"

"Now?"

"If you could. Can you?"

Warden smiled to himself. This was indeed a triumph in its way. So he was to be pitted against the new-comer—to provide brains for his party! It was *faute de mieux*, of course; but a man, when he feels really flattered, does not think of that. He had had a welcome back worth having, after all. "It is always so," he thought to himself; "a man is always best appreciated outside his own home."

But then Marie—he ought not to be an hour longer in the place without at least trying to see her.

"I have a call to make," he said; "but that will keep, if you and White really want me."

"Jump up, then—I'll drive you, and we can talk as we go along. By-the-way, I have to go a little out of my way first—you won't mind? I have to pick up a young lady who is staying with us, and who came in to make a visit, and whom I'm to drive back to Earl's Dene. You know something of her, perhaps?—Miss Raymond of New Court, you know."

"Indeed? My father used to know Mrs. Raymond."

"No doubt; she's a capital girl. I mean her to canvass for me furiously; and as you're to do the same, I must introduce you. I wish I had an elder brother, Warden—catching votes won't be such good fun as catching trout, I fancy. However, I'm in for it now—so Lester forever!" he said, with a laugh, and a touch to the horses that made them start off sharply. "I shall be as excited about it as my good aunt herself before it's all over. Gently, Bay—that child may be a voter's—so there's my first piece of bribery," he said, as he threw a coin to a small child that had apparently taken care to wait before crossing the street until its passage lay directly under the horses' heels. "And now, here we are."

They had turned into Market Street, and, to Mark's surprise, had stopped at the very bootmaker's shop to which he himself had been bound when he was overtaken by Lester. Surely it was not likely that Miss Raymond of New Court should buy her shoes in Denethorp, much less in Market Street. He devoutly hoped that none of the Lefort family might be looking out of the window, for he naturally wished to make his own visit in his own way.

Lester sent his groom with a message for Miss Raymond that he was at the door; and presently down came Ernest to say that she would be ready immediately.

Now Ernest was rather a sharp child, and something of a terrible one also, as sharp boys of his age are apt to be; nor had Cambridge turned Mark quite so much into a silk purse as to have rendered him unrecognizable. And so the messenger, without having delivered his message, and without any awe of Hugh, made a charge at the side of the trap at which his old acquaintance was sitting.

"Why, Ernest!" said the latter, with forced geniality, "where do you drop from? and how are they all?"

"Oh, all right. Oh, I was to say the lady will be down directly."

"And who are you, my man?" asked Lester.

"Oh, I'm Ernest."

"And who's Ernest?"

"Don't you know? Ernest Lefort."

"You know the Leforts, Warden?"

"Yes—that is—oh yes, I know them. Wait a minute, Ernest. I'll just run up for a second, Lester, if you don't mind."

"All right. By-the-way, would they mind my going up too? It would be rather a joke—I'll tell you why afterwards. I know one of them myself."

Now it would be doing Mark Warden supreme injustice to suppose for a moment that he was in the least really ashamed of his humble friends in the presence of his grand acquaintance. His real desire to make his visit alone was of course founded on other reasons. But still to guide the heir of Earl's Dene to the bootmaker's second floor was rather a downfall, after having been paraded in the streets of Denethorp as his familiar companion, and he felt it a little.

Monsieur Lefort had gone out to give his lessons, so that when the two entered, preceded by Ernest, they found only the three girls and Fleurette, who was amusing herself upon Miss Raymond's knee.

The circumstances were not favorable to a lover-like meeting between the husband and wife; and now that matters had so turned out, Mark was not altogether sorry that he and Marie were forced to meet as though they had been nothing more to each other than old acquaintance. But he read in her eyes, and in the warm rush of light and color to her face when she saw him, that she, however much she had changed—and changed for the better—in person during these three years, was unchanged as far as he was concerned; that her heart was still as much his as if the three years had been but three hours. And for this too, so mingled were his feelings, he could not find it in his own heart to be sorry. Who can be really disappointed or displeased at finding that a woman has remained more true to him than he has remained to her? For an instant she was once more to him the Marie of old times, and he fully answered the speech of her eyes with his own.

On their entrance Miss Raymond rose and put down Fleurette. The business of introduction seemed likely to be complicated, for there was no one in the room who was acquainted with every body in it, and, except Hugh, every body was surprised to see every body else.

"Miss Lefort," said Hugh, to cut the matter short, "I am exceedingly sorry to break up so pleasant a party; but as my friend Warden would have done so in any case, I yielded to the temptation. Miss Raymond, this is Mr. Warden of St. Margaret's, who is going to help us in our battles."

She looked at Warden with her honest eyes, and made him a cold and formal courtesy, which, had he observed it, and had he been given to speculate about such things, would have puzzled Hugh considerably. Then, turning to Marie, and seeing her embarrassment at the unexpected visit,

"Now, Miss Lefort, I really must go. Angélique, this is Mr. Lester, Miss Clare's nephew."

Now Angélique, in spite of Miss Raymond's kindness to her, always made a point of remembering and keeping what she considered her place as a dependent; and so for these few minutes she had retired into the background. Now, however, she emerged from her dark corner, and Lester saw her—suddenly.

The ascent into that poor and shabby lodging had been worth making, with a vengeance! Hugh felt as a traveller in the desert would feel who should all of a sudden light upon a rose-bush in full blossom springing from the dry stones. By the side of Alice Raymond she was like a southern night beside a pale northern morning; by that of Marie, like the full moon with its faint attendant star. He was certainly no poet, nor did conscious images enter his mind; but somehow the chairs and sofas did idealize themselves almost as absurdly as if he too had thought of Arabia Petraea in connection with them. Not that the comparison is so very absurd either, for they were certainly hard enough.

Angélique must have been exceedingly stupid indeed if she had been blind to the effect that she produced upon the prince of her cousin's fairy tale, and miraculously free from vanity had she not been gratified by it. Truly if it is the early bird that picks up the worm, it is not necessarily for its own eating.

No one else, however, noticed any thing. Miss Raymond was busy with her shawl, Marie with Miss Raymond, and Mark, as usual, with himself—perhaps also a little with Marie. Still Hugh fancied, after a moment, that he must have betrayed himself, although, in fact, he only appeared to be a little awkward, as men for the most part are under any circumstances when they have just undergone the misery of a sudden introduction.

Lester.—"Are you living in—in Denethorp, Miss Lef—Mademoiselle?" ("Damn it! what an ass she must think me!")

Angélique, not showing that she thought so at all events, and in her sweetest voice.—"I am only on a visit. Miss Raymond was kind enough to let me come here while she is at Earl's Dene. This is my home, however—at least when I am not with her."

Lester.—"Oh yes—I forgot; Miss Lefort is your sister?"

Angélique.—"My cousin."

Lester.—"I suppose you heard of our interview this morning?"

Angélique.—"Oh, she gave us quite a grand account of it."

Lester, recovering himself a little.—"And abused me, no doubt?"

Angélique.—"On the contrary, I can assure you."

Marie.—"Oh, Mr. Lester, what must you think of me? I have not thanked you and Miss Clare—"

Lester.—"You will do so by coming. And" (to Angélique, or, more accurately, at her) "you also—if—that is—"

Angélique.—"I am no artist, I am ashamed to say."

Miss Raymond.—"Don't believe her, Hugh. She does every thing."

Angélique, to herself.—"I wonder why she calls him Hugh? But I should have known if there was any thing." Aloud.—"Badly, Miss Raymond was going to add."

Miss Raymond.—"Indeed I was not, though. If Mr. Lester were not in a hurry to get away, I would punish you by condemning you to the harpsichord on the spot."

Angélique.—"Oh, pray, Miss Raymond—"

Lester, forgetting all about Warden, White, and every thing that he ought to have remembered.—"Would you? Might I ask?"

Angélique, throwing him a look of private and special complaisance.—"I would much rather you would excuse me, indeed. I am really not—"

Lester.—"But I am sure that—will you try?"

Angélique, with a look of the same kind as before, but tempered by a half smile.—"But perhaps you do not care about music?"

Lester.—"But I do indeed. There is nothing that I care for so much."

Miss Raymond, opening the harpsichord.—"Oh, Hugh, that's just what you said last night about hunting! There, Angélique—you see you will have to do it."

Angélique.—"I wish you had not raised Mr. Lester's expectations. However, I will do what I can to dissipate them. Ah, you have no doubt heard Miss Raymond herself?"

Miss Raymond, laughing.—"If he had, do you think I should give him the chance of hearing you? I am not quite so careless of my reputation."

And so Angélique, having displayed the proper amount of unwillingness, sat down and sang.

What she chose to sing is of no consequence, nor how she sang it. Lester knew nothing about music. Englishmen in those days knew as little about it as they do now, and cared about it even less. But nevertheless he was soon lost in a heaven in which he forgot every man in the world and every woman but one—in which he became so lost indeed as to forget even his horses, which were impatiently pawing the stones before the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

At last, however, when the one song had grown into many, the visit came to an end. Lester had, when in his ignorance of what was to come and on the spur of the moment he proposed to amuse himself by following up his adventure of the morning, intended that it should last about two minutes; and to him, indeed, it seemed to have lasted not a second longer. In truth, however, the church clock, unheard by him, had twice chimed the hour. Miss Raymond had been in no hurry to run away, for she enjoyed the slight-

ly Bohemian character of the whole thing, and was easily amused; and Mark, though he was not enjoying himself at all, could not under the circumstances betray his desire to cut the visit short.

When the three visitors departed, Lester carrying away with him a look, sharp as a sword but soft as velvet, thrown to him from the dark eyes of Angélique, which had the effect of filling his whole heart and of raising his spirits to a delightful point of mild fever, then said that young lady herself to her cousin—

"*Eh bien, chère enfant!* I congratulate you on that work of yours!"

"What—Mr. Lester?"

"Who but Mr. Lester, of course? He is really a very good-looking boy. And so that is the heir of Earl's Dene?"

"I really do not know. He is Miss Clare's nephew. Yes, I suppose he is."

"And has she any other nephews, or any people of that sort?"

"I believe not."

"And what do you think of my Miss Alice?"

"Of Miss Raymond? Oh, she is quite charming, and so kind!"

"Yes, she is, no doubt. Suppose there should be a match between them?"

"I am sure they would suit each other admirably."

"My dear Marie, what a child you are!"

"Why?"

"Why? because you are. And now, what has your old friend Mark Warden had to say for himself? Why, how you color!"

"Do I? I'm sure I didn't know it. I am very glad he is back again."

"He has certainly improved—he looks like a man; much more of a man than young Lester. He was a very disagreeable boy, though."

"Angélique!"

"Now, dearest, please don't scold me, or look at me through your eyebrows like that. I have no doubt he is perfection now. Do you know, I feel quite in high spirits. Do you think of going to Earl's Dene to-morrow morning?"

"To-morrow? I don't know. Perhaps one had better not to-morrow. I wish Mr. Lester had not made such a point of my going."

"Oh, Marie, what an old prude you are!"

"I think it might be better not, perhaps. It was altogether rather a fuss about nothing."

"Very likely, dear. But then one thing comes of another; and nothing doesn't come from nothing always. Now I am sure we have had a very pleasant morning party, and that would never have been but for your going to the park. And then it would seem so ungrateful of you not to go now."

"I hope not. I can't help thinking that the whole thing has gone far enough. As you say, we have had a very pleasant morning party—"

"Well?"

"And let that be the end of it."

"Why, do you take Mr. Lester for a wolf, and us for two innocent lambs? I am not a lamb, I assure you, and don't mean to be; and he seems to me to be very harmless. And Miss Raymond here too!"

"I dare say you are right. But still—Come, now we are alone, tell me something about your letter from Felix."

"There—you may read it if you like."

"What—all?"

"Why not? There are no secrets."

And so Marie took the letter, and read as follows, while Angélique returned to her favorite window, and amused herself with the first two cantos of "*Don Juan*," which she had brought down with her:—

"London. —, —th.

"DEAREST,—I am in England—in your land! In mine too, for since you left Paris, France has been my land of exile—England my true home. Are you surprised? But you can not be surprised that my body should have followed my soul. Do not be surprised if it follows you more closely still, for your absence has cheated me of the reward of seeing you. Shall you be long gone? When shall you be back? If Paris became a desert to me when you left it, what must this London be? I am angry with the sun for shining where my own sun is not; I can only hope that it is the herald of your return. Is it so?"

"The first thing I did on arriving, before doing or thinking about any thing, was to call in the Square of Portman. What a gloomy house! That also seemed to feel its desolation. There, after much difficulty—for the words 'I love you' help me not much, and of your tongue I know no more—I learned where you now are, and that you are so many leagues away. Then I carried a letter of introduction to a friend of M. Prosper, who, as you know, has friends everywhere. I found him at the theatre, where he is director of the music. He received me well, and thinks I did not wrong to come here as an artist. There is room enough for foreign musicians, he tells me, since the peace, and he will be able to get me an engagement either at his own house or at some other before my purse is empty. You will say, perhaps, this does not sound very grand. But what would you? Rome was not built in a day, and I am not afraid, were London ten times as large. Do I not love you? and is not that enough to become great—is it not more than enough?"

"I have so much to say to you, or rather I want to hear you say so much to me! For indeed I have but little to say but that I love you more than ever, were that possible; but love makes me afraid, makes me doubt, though I know your truth so well: I want to hear once more from your own lips that you have not changed since the time when Paris was not a desert to me."

"Am I to go on?" asked Marie.

"If you are not *ennuyée*," answered her cousin, calmly.

"I tremble so much when I think what kind of life is yours—not solitary like mine. If I knew not your soul so well I should often despair, even now, when I think how much you are above me. For that alone I *will* become great, and that soon. And music to me is so entirely filled with you that how can I help being inspired?"

"Of course as yet I know no one here, nor do I care to know any body or see any body but one, and she is invisible. Pray send me a line to say when I may hope for my winter to be over, and for my summer to come. If it is long first—but do not let it be long!"

"Longing for you, for any thing from you, dearest Angélique, your wholly devoted

"FELIX."

"Is it not nonsense?" asked Angélique, as she took back the letter.

But Marie did not think it nonsense by any means, and she answered by an embrace.

"Poor fellow!" Angélique continued. "Yes, he is very good, but then he sometimes is very tiresome."

Marie stared.

It did not, however, strike Angélique herself that she had said anything very surprising, so she did not observe the effect of her speech. "You see," she went on, "he is very amiable and very clever, at least as a musician, and I like him very much—better than any one I know, except you—and when I come out he would do admirably for a husband, if I am to fall into that line; and he is quite good-looking enough, and he is a gentleman, although he is only a fiddler—"

"Angélique!" This seemed to be Marie's limit of reproach.

"Marie!" replied Angélique, imitating her tone. "You don't expect me to find perfection, do you? And, after all, if it comes to that, I don't consider myself hopelessly engaged."

"Not engaged?"

"Of course we are, after a fashion. But then there are so many ways—"

"My dear Angélique!"

"Oh, you need not be afraid; I do not mean to break his heart. I shall marry him, no doubt, if he ever makes enough to keep us both from starving. You would not have me be a clog upon him, would you? And if it is not to be, why, it won't be, that's all."

It will be gathered from this conversation that Angélique was the elder of the two, not only in years, but in some other things besides. But then she had seen a great deal more of the world.

"Oh, Marie," she said, "I do wish I were a man!"

"Why?"

"Because I could marry you."

But Marie did not smile. She said, crossly for her, though not for any one else, "I know you do not mean a single word you have been saying."

"Of course not—who ever does? But I really should like to have you for my wife, Marie. But men are such simpletons. Come—don't let us quarrel any more. I feel inclined for a walk."

And so for a walk they prepared themselves—Angélique in the very best of spirits, Marie rather sadly. At all events her cousin had puzzled her considerably.

Nor is it certain that such sadness as she felt arose wholly from what seemed to her her cousin's unnatural way of speaking of her lover. That, she simply did not understand; and although it jarred upon her, she never dreamed that somehow it was not all right in reality. It was that, without knowing it, she had been disappointed in Mark Warden—if, indeed, "disappointed" is not too strong a word.

Not that she realized any such feeling. On the contrary, she was proud of his success, proud of his apparent friendship with Lester; for the people of Earl's Dene were the aristocracy, almost the royalty, of her limited world, and, paradoxical as it may sound, it is just those who know least of the world who are most impressed by rank and wealth. She was proud, also, of his improved appearance and bearing, and she was

proud that her old belief in him had been justified. But behind all this not unreasonable pride there lurked a feeling of the existence of a want or loss of sympathy—that most intangible and indescribable of feelings which is always most strong when it is most intangible and indescribable. It was not that he had seemed cold and undemonstrative. He was cold and undemonstrative by nature, and perhaps in this lay no small part of his influence over her; for reserve, inasmuch as it implies strength, is the great secret by which any thing like real influence over a woman is both gained and secured. Besides, there had as yet been no opportunity for any display of warmth, seeing that the two had met not only before others, but before strangers. But still she had found his manner towards her not such as it might have been in the presence of a hundred strangers, although she could not have specified a single instance in which he could have spoken or acted differently. The fact is, that he could not under any circumstances have spoken or acted differently; and had he been in reality altogether unchanged, no want or loss would have suggested itself. But as the want did exist, it would have equally made itself felt in any case.

It is really impossible to put in words, which are always, even at best, terribly gross and hard, the faint suggestion of another unconscious feeling that found its way into the heart of Marie; for while words are strong in proportion to their direct strength and plainness, feelings are strong in proportion to their obscurity. To attempt to express their shadowy *nuances*, even in poetry, is to risk trespassing on the province of another art; for though Art, in a very high sense, is doubtless one and indivisible, still, practically, its branches have very fixed and definite limits, which ought to be, and indeed to some extent must be, observed. Now, unfortunately, that form of art which works with words, while it is not less noble than other forms, and while it can, in many respects, soar far higher than the others, is in this respect the most limited of all. It can not affect the heart but through the logic of the mind—a terrible drawback when it is necessary that the heart should speak to the heart without the intervention of any logical process or logical symbols. Musicians and painters are far better off in this matter; they may reach the soul through the senses alone. The eye and the ear have no need of reason in order to understand; they need but to see and hear. But what can a word do, after all, with its fixed and inflexible definiteness, speaking to no sense, and only suggesting in the first instance a cold, gross sort of accuracy, which is absolutely hostile to the expression of emotion?

The application of all this is, that were one to say that the perusal of her cousin's letter produced a sensation of jealousy in the heart of Marie, a word would be employed that would be as inappropriate as possible; and yet, at the same time, any other known word would be more inappropriate still. Jealousy is a feeling of which, accurately speaking, she was utterly incapable; and had she been capable of it, it would never have been where Angélique, her heroine of heroines, was concerned. But is it just possible to conceive of a sort of jealousy—there is no help for it, the word must be used—which conveys no suggestion or taint of any thing hateful or degrading, even although its cause is fanciful and even

absurd? In the infinite series of emotions there must be some such feeling, though the note that represents it may have no place in any recognized scale. Indeed some such thing must exist, for Marie experienced it. The letter had supplied her with a material foundation upon which to fix her floating half-thoughts about her husband. She was able to make an unconscious contrast. And yet, somehow or other, he gained something by the contrast too. And so, for the first time in her life, her heart was really troubled, and she did not know why.

But it was, in truth, all plain enough. She, like her husband, had not exactly been standing still all these years.

CHAPTER IX.

BUT Angélique, though excited, was certainly not troubled in any disagreeable sense. Not that her thoughts and dreams were always of the most agreeable kind; for, thanks to her friends the Raymonds, she had seen something of the world, and was very naturally dissatisfied with her position in it. She could not avoid holding the doctrine that things in general were not quite as they ought to be. No one likes to own that he or she does not belong, by right of nature, to an aristocracy of some kind or other, and every one believes that his or her own kind is the best and truest. Miss Clare would not have agreed with her; but there is something, at least, to be said in favor of the idea favored by Mademoiselle Angélique, that beauty and talent are not in their right places when they serve only to attract peniless fiddlers, and to waste themselves upon one who, being, socially speaking, nobody, was unable to outshine by their means the plainest and stupidest of the class to which Miss Clare and Miss Raymond belonged. She could not admire a condition of things in which the maid had to outshine the mistress in vain; in which the New Courts and other good things of life belonged to the less clever; and in which Fortune, unlike the shepherd of Ida, threw the golden fruit to the less beautiful.

She was quite sufficiently quick to judge of the motives of the people about her; and she did not suppose that Miss Raymond had been invited to be a guest at Earl's Dene for nothing. Indeed, had she herself not been given to draw conclusions from what she saw, the never-ceasing gossip of the town, always busy with the affairs of every body, would have drawn them for her. Miss Clare had not entertained a visitor, save on matters of business, for years; and now, just when her heir had come of age, and was at home, she was entertaining one who was young, beautiful, and rich. Within the last few hours Earl's Dene and New Court had been married many times over by many tongues. A great many things passed through the brain of Angélique while Hugh Lester was standing over her at the harpsichord, and set her wits wandering in the country of infinite possibilities—a process with which coquetry had in reality but very little to do. Marie would have stared, indeed, had she been able to read the last thought that passed through her cousin's mind before she fell asleep, for it was nothing short of this:

"And suppose . . . and suppose that I were Mrs. Lester of Earl's Dene . . . Lady Lester of Earl's Dene . . . Angélique, Countess of Denethorp . . ."

And where she would have arrived in her dreams heaven knows, were it not that waking thoughts and dreams seldom have much in common. Perhaps she experienced in them the fate of Almaschar; perhaps they were with Felix.

But enough for the present of girls and their dreams and fancies. The war between Whigs and Tories, between Earl's Dene and the cloth-mills, had begun. Before, however, entering upon a subject of such importance, yet one word more must be bestowed upon Angélique, for her letter from Felix required an answer. In the following copy of it, the words placed in brackets appeared only in the rough draft, and were in her fair copy altered to those that immediately follow them. It will be seen that there are not many such alterations; for she was an excellent secretary, as well for herself as for Miss Raymond:

"23 Market Street, Denethorp, —th.

"MY DEAR FELIX,—I OWN I *was* surprised to learn from your letter that you were [so near me] in London. Is it quite prudent of you to have taken such a sudden step? But I suppose you considered it well, and acted under good advice. It would be most painful to me to think you had acted [thus on my account] otherwise. Did you consult M. Prosper first? If you did, you have not told me what he said. I am very much afraid [as you say it will be a disappointment to you] that I shall not be able to return to town immediately, or even soon. Miss Raymond has not yet said any thing about coming back, and of course my movements depend entirely upon hers. She has been good enough to do without me while she is here, and I am staying with my uncle and cousins [and am enjoying my visit to them very much]. Of course I shall be glad to see you. But do not think of coming to see me here; it would never do. This I mean *really*. You must stay in London and work for *your own* sake, and show a little patience for *mine*. I should be very [angry] vexed, indeed, if you were to come here; and so you will not, I am sure. Indeed I do not see how you could, as you are looking for an engagement; and you *ought* to get one as soon as you can, and not lose your chances for a mere *caprice*. If you have made a useful friend in this person to whom M. Prosper has introduced you, you must not lose him, if you really mean to be as successful as I am sure you may be if you like. With all best wishes, believe me your affectionate friend,

ANGÉLIQUE LEFORT."

Never was colder letter kissed. But then wisdom always seems cold, and Angélique was rapidly growing wise. It is one thing for a young girl, with her character scarcely formed, to indulge her first fancies by falling in love, or by imagining that she falls in love, with a kind of romance hero, especially if she had been touched by the *mania Byronicæ*; but it is a very different thing for the same girl, when months of youth, which correspond to years of later life, have defined her feelings and made her capable of forming something like a real purpose, to keep faithful to mere romance. It is not at all wonderful

that, in the day of the Medoras, the Gulnares, and their tribe, a very little mystery should have been able to go a long way in attracting her fancy. Even now, when Laras and Conrads are gone out of fashion, mystery is notoriously by no means a bad line for a man to take, if he wishes to be thought of with interest by a very young girl whose dreaming days are not yet over. When, therefore, Mademoiselle Angélique was really young, the young artist, who chose to wear his hair long, who talked in the language of romance, and yet of sincerity, about love, art, and so forth; who came from a land of hills and forests, and who, for any thing that he knew about his birth and parentage, might have been the heir of the Bourbons themselves; who preferred, as a matter of taste, to make love to her secretly, and who shared in that absurd but not unamiable kind of hypocrisy which leads very young men to like to make themselves out to be very much worse morally than they really are—had quite enough points in his favor to touch her fancy if not her heart. She would have preferred, no doubt, that they had been respectively sultana and pirate, instead of only being *dame de compagnie* and fiddler; but still imagination will do a great deal in such cases—a great deal more than change a fiddler into a pirate and a *dame de compagnie* into a sultana of sultanas. The unromantic Marie would have been safe, in all probability, from the influence of a real and genuine Lara; but the violinist was unconventional enough in his ways, singular enough in his appearance, and mysterious enough in his origin, to pass in her cousin's eyes for a sufficiently good imitation of the real thing—as a peg on which she might hang up her fancies to dry. For she had thought a great deal about love in those days—as much as she was getting to think about marriage now.

There are one or two proverbs that contain more truth than falsehood; and one of them, unhappily, is, that familiarity breeds contempt. Though mystery is a good key, it is a very bad lock; it does very well to open the door of a heart, but it is by no means well adapted to keep it safe and secure. This must be done by sheer strength; and of sheer strength, overmuch talk about love and art, and the youthful affectations of long locks and mild wickedness, are in no wise symptoms—at least not of the sort of strength that is required to hold forever a woman who had opened her eyes to the fact that the good things of the real world are by no means to be despised.

But, once more, it is the eve of battle; and yet do we linger in ladies' bowers? Nay, rather

"Sound, sound the clarion, fill the file;"

and in fact the clarion—from Redchester, at eighteenth century a day and as much beer as he can swallow—is sounding to the fray; nor are local drums and fifes wanting to beat and whistle with a heroic disregard of light and shade, of time and tune. Words, as hard as bullets, and almost as telling, are hurled about the place incessantly, and every now and then missiles that are harder still; standards are displayed, union-jack against union-jack, and motto against motto; rosettes begin to enliven frieze and broadcloth, on this side with hue of heaven—on that, with the color of flowery fields: and the armies rush together in a shower of gold and silver, as though Dene-

thorp were Danaë, wooed by rival Joves. In a word, it is a contested election of the good old days, when men hit at least as hard as they do now, and far more openly.

He who has seen, he who has heard, may picture to himself the outward phenomena of the long exciting weeks that preceded the nomination of a Burgess to represent in Parliament the borough of Denethorp. Mr. Prescott came down from London, open-handed, to represent the cause for which, according to the orators who held forth at the Checkers, "Hampden died on the field and Sydney on the scaffold." He made an admirable candidate—far better, it must be confessed, than Hugh. He was, though not an old man, an old hand at such things; and if he was not actually much more wealthy than Madam Clare, and if he did not spend more freely—that was impossible—his resources were much more readily available, and he spent with greater ostentation and *éclat*. He, moreover, had no local prestige to lose. If he won, it did not matter how he won; and if he lost, he lost no more than that one particular contest. And then he was the popular candidate, and had the noise on his side—and that, in an old-fashioned contest, was always a great point in a man's favor. In a state of things in which the sanest of men becomes part of an insane crowd, noise creates sympathy. The ordinary man always likes to add his voice to the loudest chorus; and so "Prescott forever!" was shouted forth much more often and much more loudly than the similar cry that was given for Lester. But, above all, while the latter was an untried boy, the banker from London was a man of mark and weight, with whose name newspaper politicians were familiar; and while Lester spoke only like a gentleman, and that badly, he spoke like an orator—like a mob-orator it may be, but still like an orator. Altogether he was the very type of a popular candidate; and his party in Denethorp could not have brought down a better man.

Still, Hugh had his advantages. A feeling of duty is in itself a source of strength, even in an election; and he honestly believed himself to be the champion of the right. Besides, he was, after all, fighting a stranger upon his own ground—always an immense advantage in every sort of war; for in this respect the truest of proverbs shows its weak side, and familiarity breeds not contempt but confidence. He was popular also, and his manner of canvass was such as to draw upon him no personal ill-will, even from his opponents. That was all reserved for Madam Clare, who drew upon herself a great deal of it, and not without real cause. She made no pretense of concealing her cards, and victory would be of little worth to her unless it was carried by a high hand.

She was, however, wise enough not to trust entirely to herself and her prestige. It was not without good reason that she placed great reliance upon Mr. George White, her Denethorp solicitor, who, though unused to election contests, was not unequal to them, as Mr. Prescott's more practised agent very soon discovered. And in no way did Miss Clare's lieutenant-general prove his wisdom and discretion better than in first getting hold of Mark Warden, and in afterwards gradually promoting him to be his own first-lieutenant. Mr. White was not a man of many words, but this is

the opinion of Mark that he, after a week or two of work, expressed to Mr. Brown:—

"If we were fighting for that fellow Warden instead of young Lester, by the Lord! I'd just go to bed at once, and order myself not to be called till after the poll."

The practical man, young as he was, and new to the work, found his labor congenial—far more congenial than he had found Sophocles and Newton. He was the only man on the blue side who could fight the invader with his own peculiar weapons on equal terms. He canvassed indefatigably, and not in too scrupulous a manner: he spoke often and well; and though, as an orator, he was rather apt to talk over the heads of his audience, he thereby gained no little reputation for himself. A mob is always rather flattered by having addressed to it what it does not quite understand. And then, too, he had the advantage over Prescott of being well up in all local allusions; and he had the prestige of having not only been born and bred in the place, but of having become an honor to it besides—a prestige that he and White worked to the uttermost. Perhaps, after all, the cry of "Lester forever!" was only less loud because for the name of "Lester" was so often substituted that of "Warden."

Madam Clare was not slow to see how things were going, and she became not a little jealous. But she made him a welcome visitor at Earl's Dene whenever he had occasion to call there, and treated him as his merits and services deserved. Miss Raymond, too, who had caught the election fever in its most intense form—so much so as to become sometimes quite angry with her candidate for not coming out so strongly as he ought—came to treat Warden as the hero of the hour; indeed she heard his praises sung by all around her so often and so loudly that, being a very different sort of young lady from what Miss Clare had been, she quite got rid of the impression that he had somehow made upon her at their first meeting. It was true that he could not ride across country; but then he could talk; and even with more enthusiastic amazons than Alice Raymond the tongue of silver outweighs the best hand that ever lay on bridle, when its owner knows how to use it discreetly. As for Marie, she grew ten times more proud of him than ever, and took such warm though ignorant interest in all he did, that he would have been more than man had he not felt the old chain renew itself in spite of every thing.

And then, too, in those exciting harassing weeks he needed rest sometimes, more especially as the life he was now leading was not well calculated to restore his nervous tone. And where should he find rest? At home? His father now talked nothing but politics, and Mr. Brown, of whom he had to see quite enough during the day, had now become a more frequent evening visitor than ever. At Earl's Dene? Nothing but politics there also; and besides, when he went there he had to exert himself, and to sustain his reputation. Where, in fact, should he find rest but where he ought to find it—that is to say, with Marie?

Nor was he the only visitor at Monsieur Lefort's. He generally confined himself to calling there in the evening; but when he did chance to go there in the day-time, he more than once found Hugh Lester neglecting his interests for a while to hear *Mademoiselle Angélique* sing.

This sounds but a slight matter, nor did any one concerned see any harm in it. To Marie it would have seemed the most natural thing possible had all the county crowded into the little room to hear the music that she held to be the most beautiful in the world; and, girl as she was, she was not one of those who can not see two people together without at once leaping to extreme conclusions. Monsieur Lefort did not trouble his head about it—he had other things to think about than such nonsense. Warden could not have seen any danger in it, or he would not rather have encouraged these visits of Lester's than otherwise, with a view to getting his candidate out of the way while he worked to better purpose without him. Lester, one may assume, did not; nor Angélique, one may hope, when one remembers the existence of Felix. What Madam Clare would have thought about it is another thing; but, fortunately for her repose of mind, her nephew did not include his visits to No. 23 in his daily journal of the progress of his canvass. He always had plenty to tell her without alluding to such a trifle.

But the result of it was, that more and more he left Warden to bear the burden and heat of the day alone, and that the latter daily advanced in the trust and confidence of Earl's Dene. Miss Clare did not like him overmuch; but she trusted him and was grateful to him, and that, with her, meant something better than liking. At all events, if he was setting sail under false colors, it was with a fair and favorable wind.

CHAPTER X.

It must not be supposed, however, in spite of what has been said, that the comings in and goings out of so important a person as Hugh Lester were not closely observed by those to whom they were of no consequence at all. Nor must it be supposed that even so unapproachable a person as Madam Clare was by her greatness protected altogether from the insults of her enemies.

One day when she and her guest were being driven by the family coachman in a dignified manner along the High Street, a shabby fellow, conspicuously decorated with the popular colors of green and orange, tossed into her lap the following production of the popular muse, written on a scrap of paper as disreputable-looking as the marksman himself:—

"tak care tak care
o maddom C—e
& pra mor carfull Be
for Denthorp *Queen*
is not a *eri* nor a *dean*
but No. 23

"be where be where
then maddom C—e
yor rin is geting shortt & shortt
No longer yew
rules master H—w
not now but mis L—t"

The first impulse of the great lady was, seeing the colors that the man wore, to throw it back contemptuously into the street unopened; but Miss Raymond, with a more popular tact, affected a curiosity to see it.

"Will you not read it first?" she asked.

"It is sure to be some scurrility or other. No."

But she had hesitated; and so she did read it. Then she did not throw it into the street, but put it quietly into her pocket, dirty as it was.

"And may I not see it too?" asked Miss Raymond.

"No, my dear; it is not fit for you to see."

She spoke gravely, and her guest, seeing that she was annoyed, said no more about it.

If Miss Clare had only known what was going on at No. 23 at that very moment.

Marie was generally in the room when Hugh called, but not always. She was not an idle person: she was her father's zealous and willing housekeeper, and the children's nurse and governess besides. If her cousin, who was at home for a holiday, had time and leisure to entertain visitors, she had not. She liked to see Hugh, with whom she had become very good friends; but duty had to come before pleasure, and, as she liked to have her evenings free, for her husband's sake, she had always plenty to do in the day. On this occasion, whatever she might be doing, she was certainly not in the room, which was occupied by Hugh and Angélique only. The latter was sitting at the harpsichord, but was not playing, unless playing can be held to consist in striking an occasional chord, or playing scraps of imaginary tunes with one hand.

Hugh sat close by her side.

Now it is very difficult, in speaking of the outward actions of men and women, to be altogether serious. But, in all seriousness of speech, and with no underlying thought of ridicule, let it not be imagined that the conduct of Hugh Lester in this matter is in the least degree to be regarded as absurd. It was only far too natural.

To go back for an instant to the occasion of his first meeting with Angélique—to the date of the beginning of the danger.

Now, generally speaking, a first interview is seldom really dangerous. If the woman is not beautiful, the reason is obvious enough; and if she is, the man will be disappointed, as in the case of a really beautiful work of art, by finding that she is not like or equal to what he expected to see; and he will most probably light upon her first in the midst of appropriate and harmonious surroundings that temper any thing like the violence of effect that lies in contrast. But, in this case, Hugh, young, impulsive, and heart-free, had come, as upon an unexpected discovery of his own, without warning—in the midst of poor and utterly unharmonious surroundings, and in the company of other women who might have been selected for the very purpose of acting as foils to her—upon the most beautiful woman that, as it seemed to his eyes, he had ever seen; and so the surprise, the admiration, and the pride of discovery, all blended with the charm of a subtle sort of romance which, to him at least, seemed to hang over the situation, and, brought about by the absolute power of beauty, were quite enough to render unnecessary any far-fetched theory about the nature of what people call love at first sight. What he felt then was not love; but it was what must always grow into love of some kind or other, unless absence or a miracle intervene.

But no miracle happened, nor did Hugh keep away from the flame which Angélique, for her part, did not hide under a bushel. Her coquetry

was not of that sort that has no purpose in it; and though in the comedy of human life the coquette, pure and simple, is about the most charming of characters, yet, when she is capable of purpose, she is apt to turn comedy into tragedy. The ornaments of *fêtes* and balls, whose coquetry belongs rather to the pleasant farce of human life than even to its comedy, are harmless enough; they, with their little artifices that need deceive nobody, are no more really dangerous than birds and flowers; but Angélique seemed likely to take far higher rank in the profession—to prove herself one with whom a Hugh Lester was no more in a position to cope than a fish surrounded by the net is able to struggle against the hands that draw it shoreward. The small fry, small in purse or in rank, may slip through the meshes, or some gigantic sea-monster may by sheer size and strength succeed in leaping over or breaking through them; but the good, honest, eatable fish is just the creature for whom the net is made; and for him there is no return to the sea. But still, the vain security of a stupid fish as the net surrounds it is not a pleasant sight in itself; and, in the same way, the sight of a human fish caught in a net from which there is no escaping is not in itself comic, though it is often grotesque enough. After all, whether it was love at first sight or no, it was first love that Hugh Lester was now experiencing; and first love is never absurd to those who will know it no more, even though, like all feelings that are pure and honest, the thought of it may justly enough bring a smile to the heart as well as to the lips.

At all events he was sitting now in the garden of his Armida, while the crusade was carrying itself on without the sword of him who should have been foremost of all. His attitude was expressive, for he was leaning downward and forward towards the enchantress, his eyes trying vainly to read hers, which were fixed modestly upon the keys. They had kept silence for a minute or more—he from the fullness of his heart, and she because she chose.

People are certainly provokingly perverse. It would have been so easy and natural, one would have thought, for Miss Clare's nephew—it saves trouble to give him that title at once, without perpetual explanation of the real relationship between them—to have fallen in love, if he must fall in love, with Alice Raymond, who was pretty enough, good enough, amiable enough, well-born enough, and the rest of it, to satisfy even his aunt's fastidiousness, and whose tastes agreed so well with his own. Nor is there any reason to think that Miss Raymond would have proved unconquerably cruel had he thus proved himself wise. Any man of experience, any man who knew the world, would have known in a moment which of the two to choose. Yes; but, after all, who really wishes to find too much knowledge of the world at twenty-one? There is something not ludicrous, but almost pathetic, in the apparent necessity that first love should always take an unconventional form, in its almost invariably being in the nature of a protest against the gross and unromantic reason of the world—in the way in which it almost always fixes itself upon an object which either ought not to be desired or is impossible to obtain, or which is, at the least, strange and unreasonable. All the world over, the page loves the queen, the king the beggar-maid, the sinner the

saint, and, too often, the saint the sinner. When a couple is well matched, one may very safely wager that both husband and wife have memories with which each other has nothing to do. Happily, as a rule, no man marries her whom first he loves; and when he does, there is considerable fear that his first love will not prove to be his last.

"Angélique," said Hugh at last—his pronunciation of her name, by the way, was not exactly Parisian—"will you not give me just a word—just to let me—"

"But do you know what you have done?" she said, gravely, raising her eyes for a moment—"that you have asked me—"

"To be my wife. What else should I ask you, when that is all I want in the world?"

"Are you in earnest?"

"What can I say or do to make you believe it?"

"No, I can not. Think of what I am—remember—"

"That I love you, Angélique."

"That I have, that I am, nothing—and that you—"

"Nothing! when you are all that I love!"

"A poor friendless girl—"

"Shall not I be your friend, then? Would I not make myself every thing to you?"

"Whom the world"—a scornful stress on the word—"whom the world will say caught you—"

"The world! What do I care for a hundred worlds? I shall be all the more proud to love you in its face. You are my world, Angélique."

"But I too am proud; and—"

"And yet you fear the world?"

"Not for myself—no, heaven knows! But—"

"For whom, then? Can you mean that you fear for me?" His head approached hers more closely still.

She allowed him to draw his own conclusion.

"But your career?" she went on.

"What career?"

"Are you not going into Parliament? Are you not—"

"Parliament!"

"Oh, I suppose—"

"Suppose only that I love you—suppose only that my career will be to make you happy! I will do what you please; your career shall be mine—"

"And Miss Clare!"

Hugh was silent for a moment. Then he said—

"Miss Clare has been more than a mother to me. She, I know, only desires my happiness, and she will welcome my wife as her daughter." But he did not speak quite so confidently as before.

"I am afraid of Miss Clare—Hugh." The little hesitating pause before his own Christian name gave point to her first utterance of it.

"And if she did object, which is impossible, I am my own master, I suppose?"

"But you are not master of Earl's Dene."

"Angélique!"

His tone put her in mind of Marie, and she smiled to herself.

"Do not mistake me," she replied; "I am not thinking of Earl's Dene. I could be happy in a cottage. I have been brought up to earn my own bread, and am willing to earn it. No—do not ask me to give up a life of toil to which I

have always looked forward; I shall contrive not to be unhappy, never fear! But I will not stand in your way. You shall not run the risk of losing a single acre of Earl's Dene for me."

"Angélique! When I would lose a hundred Earl's Denes for a word from you! Is that all? If Miss Clare shows that all her affection for me has been so hollow, the tie between her and me must be broken. There are bounds to the duty of a real son to a real mother. I will not lose you, Angélique, if I lose every thing for you. Ought not a man to leave both father and mother for his wife? And what would every thing in the world be to me without you? And you should not suffer. I would toil for you—I am strong enough; and let Earl's Dene go to the devil."

This was not in itself particularly eloquent; but if he could only have managed to speak in the same manner and with the same energy to the electors of Denethorp, Prescott and Warden would have gained but few laurels.

"But Miss Clare will not object," he went on, after a short pause. "I must know her better than you can. She will love you, when she knows you, nearly as much as I do. She would not be able to help it, Angélique. But do not let us talk of that—I know I am not worthy to look at one like you; but I do love you more than any body else ever can, and I will try all I can to make you happy—to make you like me. And don't think of me as if the world mattered a straw to me. I hate it all. I only wish I were as poor as a rat."

"But indeed—indeed I ought not—"

"Ought not to like me?"

"No, indeed; how can one help what one feels? But—"

"Then you can, you do love me, Angélique?"

"Oh, I ought not, indeed—but what can I say?"

And so, instead of saying any thing, she allowed her lover to place his arm around her, and once more to draw his own conclusion.

This was one great point gained; but it was not every thing. In spite of his boasted knowledge of his aunt's character, she had, or thought she had, a much better comprehension of it, even although his was derived from long intimacy, and hers from hearsay and guess-work. She also thought it just as likely as not that Hugh, in his joy and confidence, and as a matter of duty, would go straight to his aunt at once, and let her know of the important step he had just taken; and this would not suit her at all. She did not wish even her uncle or her cousin to know any thing of the matter except at her own time and in her own way.

Beginning with the less important point of the two—

"Dear Hugh," she said, "I am so confused with all this that I do not know what I am doing or what I am saying. Marie will be coming in soon—don't let her know any thing; I will tell her myself when I am more quiet. So you really think that Miss Clare will not mind? I should be so unhappy if I thought she would. I could not bear to think that I was the cause of your quarrelling with your best friend."

"Why, dearest," Hugh was beginning, when Marie came in, carrying a note in her hand.

Angélique was vexed and looked it, but recovered herself quickly, after a warning look at Hugh.

"Ah, Miss Marie," said the latter, who was not able to compose himself quite so suddenly, "I was afraid I should not have seen you this morning. And, as it is, I shall have to make the same speech serve for good-morning and good-bye." He looked at his watch. "By Jove! I really must be off. I ought to have met White an hour ago. I suppose it's too late now, though, but I must try."

"If it is really too late you had better stay," said Marie. "But perhaps you will learn from this," and she gave him the note. "It has just come from Mr. White's for you. I suppose they knew you were here."

"DEAR LESTER," he read—"Come over to White's office at once, if you can. We have been waiting for you an hour, and I have just heard where you are; and—you will, I am sure, excuse advice given in your interest—I think you had better not make quite so many visits at the Le-forts just at present. You know how absurdly people here will talk. I write this in case you can not come over now, for I have to leave the town for a day or two. Yours, most truly,
"M. W."

Here was an opportunity for him to begin flying in the face of the world! But the childish thought was but momentary, and he took his leave at once, to Angélique's extreme annoyance. She had but half done her work, after all. She dreaded a premature explosion of her mine, for she had the very smallest opinion of her lover's discretion.

By the time that the latter reached the office of White & Son, Warden had left it; and as the lawyer was for the moment engaged, Mr. Brown, as a polite attention, placed in his hands a bundle of the last election squibs, printed on orange-colored paper, to amuse him while he waited.

Most of them were silly enough; but there was one that was by no means silly, whatever else it was.

It was a copy of verses directed against Mark Warden, and about the grossest thing of the kind that Hugh had ever seen; indeed it was wonderful how the satirist had been so ingenious as to find so many holes in the coat of one whose life had apparently been so immaculate, and to discover so many foibles in a character that was so unusually exempt from them. But his very strength and consistency were so treated as to appear in the guise of weaknesses; his very youth was turned into a stumbling-block, and his talent into an offense. He was made to look like a selfish hypocrite, cold-hearted and cold-minded, seeking only his own ends, and without any better end than the most sordid sort of success. But this is to say little, for in satire form and manner are every thing. The whole thing was done with the hand of a master, and was crowded with cruel wit and savage humor. The blows were dealt unsparingly, and every point was made to tell. It was evident that the enemy, if they had been rivalled in eloquence, had determined not to be outdone with the pen, and that they had got hold of a man of nothing short of genius to write their lampoons. Moreover, the wit and the humor were by no means too subtle to be appreciated by the coarsest and most stupid of readers. It was

as though the ghost of Swift himself had suddenly taken an interest in the Denethorp election, and had changed its politics. But the strangest thing about it was, that it was evidently written by some one who had a more intimate knowledge of Warden than any one at Denethorp—by one, to whom his college career was as familiar as his part in the election. The allusions to it were horribly distorted, but they were perfectly open to the eyes of any one who had been contemporary with him at Cambridge.

Its abominable coarseness is a bar to the appearance of even an extract from it here. Indeed coarseness is a very mild term to apply to either its matter or its style.

"What in the name of every thing detestable is this?" asked Hugh, as Mr. White entered.

"Ah, you've read that, have you? I wish you could spot the author. He seems to be a Cambridge man."

"I hope not, for the sake of the University; and I certainly know of no one who could or would have written such a thing. Has Warden seen it?"

"I wish you did know him, though," answered the agent. "It is damned clever—devilish clever. We would try the same shop."

"I beg you will not think of any such thing."

"I don't know, Mr. Lester. It seems to me—if you'll excuse me for saying so—that you have left us pretty much of late to ourselves. Now, if you leave the battle to us altogether, as you seem rather inclined to do, you must let us fight it in our own way. And this thing here is not a bad style of way, I think—and Warden thinks so too."

"So Warden is going to be away! Is it about our business?"

"I don't know, Mr. Lester, and I didn't ask him," said the attorney, taking a pinch of snuff. "Sir, that friend of yours will be Lord Chancellor! He's a practical man, sir—and that's worth all your law ten times told."

CHAPTER XI.

IF Denethorp is a difficult place to arrive at, it is a still more difficult place to leave. Nevertheless it must be left at last, if only for a time.

The night of the day on which Hugh Lester had committed himself to his Armida was fine and warm, not only at Denethorp, but in London also. It was fine even in Fleet Street, and fine even in that thoroughfare which runs at the back of Farringdon Market and joins Fleet Street with Holborn.

And it had need to be fine in that narrow, crooked, evil-looking lane which, at all events in those days, knew no light save of the moon and stars; and they had barely room to shine. And yet there were, once upon a time, people who looked upon that dark and disreputable passage as the political centre of the world—as an institution to which Westminster itself had to yield the palm of influence. Nor were there wanting distinguished and even great men, who increased their own influence by countenancing the notion.

The institution upon which its reputation in this respect was founded was a public-house with a large room at the back of it, which was nightly filled to overflowing.

Now on this particular evening the attendance was even more than usually large, although not more than usually distinguished. The dense clouds of rank smoke issuing from a quarter of a mile of clay, and mingled with the steam that arose from a barrel and a half of hot liquor, were not out of keeping with the style of the politicians who emitted the one and absorbed the other. There were tailors and cobblers from the north and from the east, brokers from Bell Yard, Irish students from Gray's Inn, some seedy-looking barristers from the Temple, bagmen from the City, medical men from nowhere in particular, and scribblers from, say, Grub Street, thinking themselves in all honesty to be Grattans and Burkes at the very least. Mingled with these were one or two persons who had made an excursion to the place either out of curiosity or for some other special reason; and the inevitable one or two, seen in every public place in London, who have blundered in by mistake, and who never know either where they are or what they are doing. But the general tone of the assemblage was that of *habitués*.

It is, however, not with one of the *habitués* that we have now to do; for, among the strangers, sitting in a quiet corner and watching the proceedings with interest, was Mark Warden.

The subject of the debate was of course political; and much was said in the course of it about the Westminster election, with which all men's minds were then full. Sir Francis Burdett seemed to be the hero of the evening; and if one or two of his Majesty's Ministers could have heard half the epithets that were heaped upon their names whenever they were mentioned, they must either have been utterly overwhelmed on the spot, or have been rendered callous to abuse forever.

It must not be supposed, however, that the speaking consisted of nothing but abuse. On the contrary, Warden was surprised to hear many pieces of real, though turgid, eloquence, especially on the part of the Irish element, and not a little good sense, put with practised skill. It was ~~met~~, indeed, a highly intellectual or cultivated assembly, but it was neither an ignorant nor a stupid one; and the forms of debate were observed with a strictness and fairness that went far to compensate for much want of courtesy.

At last, however, there was a short pause in the proceedings, of which advantage was taken by a man who sat at the far end of the room to rise upon his legs quickly but a little unsteadily. He was a big, burly fellow, with a heavy face, which, however, in spite of its far too plainly showing the signs of coarse self-indulgence, was neither without some pretension to good looks, nor, in spite of the apparent contradiction in terms, without some degree of refinement. His ~~clothes~~ were shabby in the extreme, and negligently put on—his finen was dingy and crumpled—he looked as though he were unfamiliar with the very idea of soap, and as though he used the bluntest of razors, and that but seldom; while his thick, bushy head of hair was all rough and tumbled about as though, if he did condescend to keep a razor, he disdained even to borrow a comb. He was probably young in years, but it was difficult to say.

He was evidently well known there, for his rising was greeted with much hammering of *glasses upon the tables*. Meanwhile he only

stood swaying himself clumsily about, and he continued to do so for a full minute after the applause had come to an end: but the company showed no sign of impatience, and at last he began to speak.

His first words were so thickly spoken as to be inaudible, and a murmur of disappointment ran round the room.

"Sure and he's waited too lete, inthoirely," said one who sat next to Warden.

"But it's just too airly," said another. "The laddie's nae gude till he's fou."

"And do you call him sc'ler now?" asked Warden.

"That just depends upon a' the ceerrroom-stances," his neighbor answered, guardedly.

But by this time the orator had found both his legs and his voice—a big, resonant chest-voice that left his large mouth without a taint of thickness or huskiness, and filled the whole place with its sound.

"Now we shall catch it 'ot and strong!" exclaimed another of Warden's neighbors, rubbing his hands with delight.

And, sure enough, they did. After a few words to say that he was going to support the popular side, he set himself to work to destroy all the arguments that had been urged in its favor, and to ridicule all who had used them. Then he told the house that it was to be supported on entirely other grounds; and, with extreme ingenuity, so twisted and distorted his opponents' arguments as to make them seem to be his own. He appeared to revel in paradox, and in ridicule of every body and every thing. It was not a speech to convince, but it was really great art in its way, and, indeed, was not intended to convince. He was often interrupted, but woe be to those who interrupted him! for all that they got for their pains were personalities, from which they would rather have escaped free. To judge from the difficulty that he found in starting, he had evidently been drinking more than enough; but yet he had all the speeches of the speakers who had preceded him at his fingers' ends—and not only their arguments, but their very words—and not only their very words, but their very tones. His own speech was not a magnificent specimen of real argument, but it was really a magnificent specimen of sophistry, of humor, and of sarcasm—even of eloquence; for he not seldom soared into true eloquence, especially towards the close. At the same time it must be said that, while but few of the speeches of the evening had been distinguished by refinement of style, his was full of points and allusions that render any report of it out of the question, and which were received with that sort of laughter with which such an audience receives what even such an audience is half ashamed to hear.

When he sat down he had succeeded in insulting alike both friends and foes; and yet he was applauded by foes and friends alike with something more than the knocking of tumblers. Every body had been made angry, and yet every body was delighted that every body else had been put down.

"There, mee jools—that's the thrue forrum, bedad, any how!" said the first of Warden's neighbors.

"It's vara weel—vara weel indeed," said the second.

"I sed as you'd get it 'ot!" said the cockney, whose anticipation had been amply realized.

"Is he often here?" asked Warden.

"Ye'll nocht have hurried um till noo?" was the Scot's idea of an answer—question for question.

Warden glanced at his watch. "Goöd-night, I must be going," he said to his neighbors generally; and then, having paid for what he had taken for the good of the house, picked his way among the tables to where the late orator was sitting in majestic repose.

"Barton!" he said.

"And who the devil—" was the other's polite answer, as he swung round brusquely.

"Don't you remember me? Warden of St. Margaret's."

"Warden of Mag's! By God! so you are. What'll you drink?"

"Nothing for me. I only came to see you."

"Well here I am. Fire away."

"This is a queer place, isn't it? I have never seen the sort of thing before, so, having nothing else to do to-night, I thought I'd look in. And I have certainly been rewarded. I didn't know you were a second Demosthenes."

"Waiter!—another! No—two others: one for this gentleman."

"No—nothing more for me. I suppose this is all pretty well over? At least I don't care to stay. What are you going to do?"

"What—am—I—going—to do? How the devil should I know?"

"Then, if you don't know, come and have some supper with me. I am at the—"

Barton got up at once. "I'm your man," he said. "Have some bones and a bottle of port. We'll be Titans, and port shall be our Pelion." And so, taking Warden's arm to steady himself, he half walked, half lurched, into the open air. He had not been asked for his reckoning; probably the landlord considered his company too valuable to run the risk of losing it.

It will probably have been conjectured that Warden's presence in Shoe Lane was not quite so accidental as it professed to be. He was not likely to have come from Denethorp to London just now for nothing. But, however this may be, he showed himself sufficiently hospitably disposed, now that he was at his journey's end; for his companion and himself can not very well be accounted congenial spirits.

Nor did his offer of hospitality appear to be unappreciated. Barton, as soon as the first effects of the open air had passed away, stalked, not staggered, along in a state of high good-humor, making the now half-empty streets ring with his heavy tread, his loud voice, and his still louder laugh. It is true that he talked rather to himself than to his companion, and without much heeding whether he was listened to or not: but still he was genial after a fashion.

So they proceeded for some distance, arm in arm, when Warden stopped suddenly.

"Look there, Barton," he exclaimed; "what is that?"

Barton placed his hand over his eyes, and looked towards the part of the sky to which the other had pointed.

"That? That is a fire," he answered. "Let's see it," and he hurried Warden along in the direction of the centre of the glow. Very soon

they met with others hurrying in the same direction; and, before long, guided by the infallible instinct in such matters that belongs to a crowd, they found themselves in front of the—Theatre.

Any one who, like Barton, had hurried there in order to witness a great spectacle, certainly found himself fully gratified. Over the whole block of buildings of which the theatre formed a part, soared up high into the air, even as it seemed to the sky itself, a vast unbroken sheet of flame that looked like a mirror of fire. The color of the night, which was still fine and clear, was changed altogether from that produced by the mixture of white moonlight and the natural blackness of the streets into a uniform dull redness, far more unbearable to the sight than the direct blaze of such sunlight as those gloomy streets ever experienced even on a summer day. It was, in a word, one of those great fires which are the grandest sights of great cities; which alone afford to their inhabitants any idea of the sublimity of nature when her strength is for once set free from the weight of bricks with which they have crushed her down. In this case the complete triumph of the flames had been the work of a few minutes only. The crowd that had hurriedly surrounded the doomed building could do nothing in the face of such a wall of heat and light—nothing but passively contemplate it with a sort of desperate admiration.

Barton in his excitement pressed close to the scene, dragging Warden with him. The avenue by which they approached the blaze was a narrow street which lay along that side of the house in which were the entrances to the gallery and stage. As on this side there were no windows through which any of the flames within might escape, so the effect which met their eyes was made up of a dense blackness surmounted by fire, in strong contrast with the red glow of the sky and of the opposite houses. The danger in case the wall should fall outwardly was great; and this, probably, according to the nature of crowds in general, was the reason why it was precisely here that the throng was thickest. The broad shoulders of Barton, and his complete carelessness about the shoulders of others, as well as for the abuse with which he was frequently assailed, but which he was well able to pay back in kind, soon forced a passage for himself and for his companion; and there they stood for some minutes sharing in the dead silence around them, which was only broken by the hissing of the flame, and by occasional ejaculations of delight whenever the glow made a sudden leap upward. Fortunately the delight of the by-standers was prevented from being entirely complete by their disappointing knowledge that the house had been empty for some hours, and that consequently the lust of horror, which is one of the chief attributes of a crowd under such circumstances, was doomed to be ungratified.

Presently, however, it seemed as though Fate was for once about to bestow more than it had promised, and to provide a real tragedy after the spectacle.

Though no human lives were in immediate danger, the burning house, nevertheless, contained what was worth the while of many to risk life itself to save. Close by the stage-door, opposite to which Barton and his friend were standing, had gradually gathered together, among others immediately connected with the theatre, a group

of some of the unfortunate members of the orchestra, whose only means of livelihood were being consumed almost before their eyes. For one with the income of a fiddler or trumpeter to lose his instrument is much the same, in its consequences to him, as to lose his very hands—it means at least temporary ruin, and probably something worse than ruin, to himself and to those who are dependent upon him. But still, what was to be done! Who would be so rash as to plunge into that Phlegethon?

Suddenly Barton felt himself, in spite of his shoulders, thrust aside; and turning round saw a young man who, like himself, had contrived to reach the front, but, to judge from his appearance and figure, less by dint of strength than by force of energy and activity.

The new-comer, having reached the door, mounted upon one of the steps outside it, and then faced round quickly.

"Gentlemen!" he said, in a most un-English accent, but in a clear and ringing voice, "we lose the time. It has there not more than five minutes that the theatre burns itself; and it is possible that our instruments are not yet hurt. In five minutes one shall have them—me, at the least, I shall have the mine. *Suivez-moi!*"

And so, with the air of a captain talling upon his company to follow him into the breach, he ran straight through the stage-door.

Such an example is notoriously contagious; and there were not more than one or two of his comrades that did not follow—possibly their instruments were safe at home. There were even one or two volunteers, amongst whom Barton was conspicuous. He had come for the whole spectacle; and he was apparently not one whom any instinct of self-preservation would restrain from seeing all of it that there was to be seen.

But there was also one who, without having any thing at stake, and without being a volunteer, also accompanied the charge. Mark Warden, grasped by Barton and pushed from behind, had to enter the narrow and intricate passages of the house whether he would or no. And though he did not feel fear, he would certainly have preferred to be left outside. He would scarcely have cared to risk life for life; and much less did he care to risk it to satisfy unproductive curiosity, or to save somebody else's violin.

Not sharing, therefore, in the eagerness with which the rest ran forward, but rather drawing himself backward from them as well as he could, he before long found himself alone in a labyrinth; nor, so sudden and rapid had been the process of his arrival there, was he able to regain the outer air without a guide. So he made up his mind, as the wisest thing he could do, to wait there quietly till the others returned, seeing that, if he tried to extricate himself, he would probably only succeed in making matters still worse.

How long he waited there he did not know, but certainly a much shorter time than it seemed. But all of a sudden he became terribly aware that the passage in which he stood was beginning to fill rapidly with smoke; and he heard, instead of the returning feet of his companions, an ill-omened roar of voices outside.

In another moment his ears heard a worse sound still, and that not outside, but close at hand. It was as though the whole building had given an audible shudder, which passed through

himself also. Lifting his eyes, he saw a fearful sign of doom indeed. The ceiling was cracking in long lines above him, through which rained a shower of sparks; and a tongue of fire, which at every beat of his pulse grew longer and wider, had licked its way through the cornice, and was writhing on and on towards him through the air.

The roaring of flame, the falling of beams, were now the only sounds he heard. The whole world seemed to have suddenly faded away, and to have left him alone with instant death.

Who may describe the terror, the despair, of a moment when a lifetime of horror seems crushed into the space of the falling of a single grain of sand? It was not even as though a struggle for life was still possible. With his energy unimpaired, he could do nothing but wait for the end, and pray that it might be soon.

And yet he did not lose his presence of mind. But that only made his utter powerlessness all the more terrible to bear. The most abject terror is nothing to what he has to undergo who retains his senses and his strength only to find in them additional instruments of torture.

Meanwhile the orchestra had been reached; those who could find them were already hurrying away with their instruments by another entrance—for the passage leading to the stage-door was no longer practicable—and in another instant the hand of the young musician who had led the way would have grasped the instrument for whose sake he had entered the house of fire, when Barton, who was close to him, suddenly exclaimed,

"Good God! where is Warden?"

He heard the exclamation, and turned. A word or two, rapidly uttered, passed between him and Barton; and then at once, forgetting his violin, and in spite of the suffocating smoke-clouds that were thick enough almost to destroy without the aid of flame, he dashed back through the perilous entrance from which his companions were now flying in confusion. Barton would have followed; but no sooner did he attempt to do so than his passage was barred by the sudden descent of a burning beam, so that he had perforce to make the best of his way out with the rest.

Warden had just given himself up for lost. His lungs were already more full of smoke than of air, and he could already feel upon his face the hot breath that gloved from the fiery tongue that had now come so near as almost to have broadened into a sheet of flame, when, borne in, as it seemed to him, upon a blazing cloud, stood before him the figure of the young musician.

"Quick!" cried out the latter in French, "quick—in another moment—"

Unaware of the risk that had been run by a stranger for his sake, thinking only, if he could be said to think at all, that it was to save himself that his guide had returned, Warden followed him into the street.

It was indeed only a moment that had lain between them both and certain death. There was barely time for them to regain the outside of the house, when a crash, followed by a sympathetic cry from the crowd, told that the heavy roof had fallen in, and that all was over.

Then rode up a troop of the life-guards; but except for their adding to the effect of the scene by reflecting the red and white light of the flames from their helmets and cuirasses, they might

as well, for any good they found themselves able to do, have remained quietly in their barracks. Foot-guards also, and volunteers in uniform, mixed with the crowd; and, all too late, and yet as quickly as had been possible, came the galloping of fire-engines from all directions—just in time for their drivers to see and hear the terrible crash that told of the fall of the outer walls themselves. Then the flames, after a last leap upward, suddenly sank down into the crater thus formed, and the tragedy was wholly at an end.

For although not a single life had been lost, even by the falling of a brick or of a beam, it was nevertheless a real tragedy that had just been played; for the sudden destruction of a great theatre means worse than death to hundreds. While the members of the company who happened to be present became able to think of their losses, the pickpockets of their gains, the respectable spectators of going home, and the rabble of beer, the carpenters who had lost their tools and the musicians who had lost their instruments of suicide.

"I wouldn't have lost that sight for a thousand pounds," said Barton, turning carelessly to the young musician, who happened to be standing just behind him. "Damned lucky, though, that the walls fell in instead of out. It was within the turning of a brick that some of us never saw a theatre again, outside or in. *Sic me, non se, servavit.*"

On hearing himself addressed, the other started as from a dream.

"You call it lucky!" he exclaimed, in a tone of scorn that was as un-English as his accent.

Barton first stared, and then laughed good-humoredly. "Did you want a brick on your head, then? I didn't—at least not before supper. After that, perhaps—"

"Monsieur?"

"Ah, *vous ate oon frongçais? je asked—demandais vous si vous wanted, you know, oon brick soor voter tate?*"

"As well there as on—"

"As on what?"

"As on *that*—as on my violin."

"You belong to the orchestra, then?"

"I did, I suppose."

"Poor devil! then I'm damned sorry for you." He was perfectly sober now, and yet he spoke lightly. Nevertheless, as he spoke he thrust his hand into his breeches' pocket. But it came out empty.

"Curse it!" he exclaimed, "not a farthing. Why, I had ever so many shillings this morning—four, at least. I say, Warden—do you carry a purse? Just lend me something or other."

Warden, who had now fairly recovered his composure, but was still ignorant of his obligations to his preserver from death, slowly drew out his purse and handed it to Barton, who held it out, without looking to see what it contained, to the unfortunate musician. "Never mind the fiddle," he said; "one's as good as another, I suppose."

But he to whom it was offered drew back, placed his hands behind his back, and bowed.

"*Je suis gentilhomme,*" he said, with some dignity.

"A gentleman are you? Then go and be damned for one," shouted Barton; and, taking Warden's arm, stalked off again.

"That burnt-out son of a fiddle calling him-

self a gentleman!" he said, as they continued their progress. "Why, I shall be calling myself one next—or even you, Warden."

His companion swallowed the impertinence silently, although he did not like it by any means. He also did not choose to notice that Barton had forgotten to return the purse.

They soon arrived at the hotel, which was not far from the scene of the fire; and the bones having been made bare and the port renewed, the latter recovered his temper.

"Barton," said Warden, after a short time, and without having made any allusion to their adventure, "I always knew you were the best of us all, and that those blockheads of dons didn't know a good man when they'd got him. But I had no idea you could do what you have been doing lately."

"Pooh! one must get one's liquor somewhere."

"Oh, I don't mean that—I mean something still better."

"And what's that?"

"It is really the best thing of the kind I ever saw—as good in its way as your trochaics on the proctors. They were superb; I know them by heart still; but I almost think this beats them. I wish you had done it in Greek, though," he added with a smile, as he handed him a copy of the famous squib.

Barton took it, looked at it with one eye, seemed puzzled for a minute, and then exploded into a roar of laughter, which he did not attempt to check.

"Oh, this!" he said at last. "I'm glad you like it, though! I was afraid it wasn't strong enough."

"It's quite strong enough, I assure you."

"Ha—ha—ha! Do you want it made stronger! I'll just add a line or two now, if you like. I feel in the humor. Look here—"

"Are you turned so venomous a radical, Barton?"

"I? Damme, no. What do I care for your politics and stuff? Tom Prescott's a devilish good fellow—ten times what you are, Warden: but I'd write like a Tory for sixpence."

"No, no, Barton, that won't do. A man can't do a thing like that twice in his life."

"I bet you I could, though."

"I would take your wager, if I were not sure you would lose."

"Come—what will you bet I don't do it?"

"A thing as good as this on the other side? Against Prescott himself?"

"Against the devil, if you like."

"Well then, I lay you ten guineas to half a crown, you can't write a squib on Prescott as good as this is."

"Done! Waiter! Pen—ink—paper."

"But surely you won't do it at once?"

"Just the time. Can't write in the morning—never could. Now or never. Damn it, though—just keep the ink-bottle steady. I must keep my finger on my left eyelid, I see—capital plan when the letters get mixed up. Here goes."

Pressing two fingers over his left eye, and swaying and nodding over the table—for he had by this time drunk more than enough to render any ordinary man incapable of doing any thing—he dashed at the paper and wrote rapidly in a sprawling hand, laughing to himself from time to time

with enjoyment of his own work. At the end of an hour or rather more, during which he had consumed the whole of another bottle of port, the task was done. He threw himself back triumphantly in his chair, upsetting the ink-bottle in the process, hurled the pen to the other end of the room, and tossed the paper, all smeared and blotted, but not quite illegible, to Warden. "There you are," he said. "That'll wash."

Warden read it over quietly; and then, without a word, handed two bank-notes to the author, who pocketed them forthwith, and then called out—

"Waiter! a bottle of brandy! and now we'll make a night of it."

Alas for Warden! Before long he began to think that he had fallen into the clutches of a demon—that he had raised a fiend from whom he should never be able to free himself. The hour was already very late; but many other hours flew by, and still Barton sat there, drinking brandy, talking, quoting, spouting Greek, and boasting—all in a style which, though always coarse, was at first amusing and even witty, but very soon degenerated into such sheer, unutterable filth, devoid of either wit or humor, that even Warden, who was not particular, and who was not listening to him for the first time, was amazed. At last, sleepy and weary as he was, and almost overcome by the reaction that had followed upon his escape from such extreme danger as that in which he had been placed so short a time since, the disgusting monotony of his guest's talk became torture. If the man would but get drunk enough to be put into a hackney coach and sent away! But no—the more he drank, the more he talked, the clearer grew his voice, and the steadier his hand, although, no doubt, he would have found it impossible to rise from his chair. Warden made as many hints as he could about his own fatigue; but he might as well have spoken to the bottle as to Barton. Nor did he dare to march off to bed, for fear of what might happen; for the waiters had retired long ago. Five o'clock struck, and there sat Barton: six o'clock, and he sat there still: seven o'clock, and the house was stirring; but he seemed more immovable than ever. At last, without remembering how, Warden dropped asleep in his chair from sheer exhaustion; and when again he woke, the first thing he saw was Barton, curled up upon the hearth-rug, sleeping like a child.

"There's one comfort," he thought to himself, rather revengefully, as he took his way wearily to the Denethorp coach: "the beast must be killing himself—and not by inches."

CHAPTER XII.

EVERY body who is not of a purely lymphatic temperament must, during the course of the day, accumulate a certain amount of ill-temper, which has to be let out somehow or other. On the whole, the most pleasant people to deal with are those who let it evaporate as it comes, spreading it over every part of the day and over every body with whom they come in contact—themselves, their friends, and strangers impartially; for the result is that their ill-temper is dealt out in such infinitesimal doses at a time as to annoy nobody very

much. Others, again—and this is by no means a bad way—reserve theirs for some particular period of the twenty-four hours, such as breakfast-time or the hour before dinner, when nothing that any body says or does signifies any thing to any body. But there are some—and, unfortunately, these form the majority—who reserve theirs for particular people; who are all that is delightful to the world at large, but who, at home, are bears, or tigers. So common is this practice, that a person who is exceptionally genial in society is seldom one with whom it is altogether pleasant to live. Now, Angélique Lefort, like every body else, had her annoyances, and, consequently, her passages of crossness; and as she was far too amiable a person to display these to the world, she was forced to let herself out either in solitude or among her slaves at home, when she happened to have them at hand. It is very doubtful if Hugh Lester would have continued to be quite so much in love had he had the command of a magic mirror for the rest of that day. It was mainly with Marie that she was put out for having interrupted her *tête-à-tête* at so exactly the wrong moment; but it was not so much upon her cousin that the avenging cloud settled as upon the rest of the household. The children were snubbed to their hearts' content, until Ernest settled down into sullenness and Fleurette into tears: and even the mild old father of the family found his coffee bitter. But as every thing that their divine Angélique said or did was always necessarily right, she was only petted and sympathized with all the more—silently, that is, for no one dared to say a word to her, except Ernest, who was not over-fond of his cousin, and who, in consequence, got as severe a reproof from Marie as she was capable of bestowing.

But, fortunately for her, the days of magic mirrors had long gone by, so that Hugh went his way with no image of her in his mind save such as she had afforded him in person.

After his interview with his agent was over, he went home to Earl's Dene, and, as was his habit, reported to his aunt and her guest all that he had learned of the progress of affairs in town. But his heart was not in his story, for he had already obtained the triumph for which he cared the most. His real business now was to render to Miss Clare the explanation that was due to her as mistress of Earl's Dene from her heir and adopted son, and which he felt ought not to be delayed.

Nevertheless, manly as he was in all essential things, he could not but feel a little nervous about telling the old lady that there was to be an heiress to Earl's Dene as well as an heir—or, as he intended to put it to her, that she was to have a daughter as well as a son. He had all his life, like most of those about her, been a little afraid of her, in spite of his experience of her affection for him; and perhaps the enormity of proposing to marry Miss Raymond's dependent seemed a little greater now, as a matter of confession, than it did when he was actually urging his suit.

Fortunately or unfortunately, however, according as it might have turned out, he could find no opportunity of telling her his story in the course of that evening: at least he thought he could find none, which is practically the same thing. While smoking his nightly cigar, however, he made up his mind that, come what come might, he would

tell it the next morning; and resolved, not out of deference to the advice of Mark Warden, but in order to compel himself to keep his resolution, that he would refrain from calling in Market Street until his story was told.

Next morning, then, he rose with a full intention of doing what was obviously right, and, when breakfast was over, was on the point of telling Miss Clare that he wished to speak with her, when she herself anticipated him by saying, when Miss Raymond had left the room,

"Hugh, you know how I despise such things; but look at this that some man in the street was impudent enough to throw at me yesterday." And she gave him the crumpled piece of paper that she had kept in her pocket.

He read the warning, and blushed to his hair.

"What is this, aunt?" he asked, angrily.

"That is just what I wanted to ask you," she answered. "One knows what things people write and say at elections, but this is such an extraordinary thing to say."

"And did any one dare—"

"I told you. It was thrown into the very carriage—into my very lap. Really people here seem to have lost all respect, all decency. And yet this could not have been done without some meaning or other. I suppose they have got hold of some story of your meeting Miss Lefort in the lodge park when you first came down.

"No, aunt; I do not think it is that."

"Just let me speak kindly to you, Hugh. It is not the first time that I shall have given you advice, nor, if you take it, will that be for the first time either. I am an old lady, you know, and may talk about such things; and, as you may have guessed, perhaps I have not always lived so much out of the world as I have since you have known me."

"My dear aunt, I—"

"Listen to me first, please. I can make all manner of allowances. This Miss Lefort is, I hear, a respectable girl. Now—"

"But, aunt—"

"Wait, please. Now—you know what I mean—I should be very sorry indeed to think that you, meaning no harm even, as I am sure you would not, had been putting any nonsensical ideas into the head of any young girl who is good and respectable. I do not ask you any questions—"

"But I assure you—"

"But I do wish to ask you—and now, of all times—not, by any conduct of yours, to give the people of the town occasion to speak ill of Earl's Dene. You are almost a Clare, you know, and should remember our motto. The French have a saying which to my mind is a very noble one, when rightly used, that '*Noblesse oblige*.' We, my dear Hugh, are in a position to set an example, not only of right conduct, but of conduct that should be without a suspicion of wrong. We must give up our amusements for the sake of our duties. You understand me, I know."

"Quite, aunt; but—"

"And just think for a moment. This girl is the sister of Miss Raymond's companion—"

"Cousin, aunt."

"Well, almost the sister—of Miss Raymond's servant, in fact. It can not be decent that you should give people occasion to say that you are on too intimate terms with her, no matter how

contemptible may be those who say it. Besides, it is not fair, not kind, to the girl herself, to whom, in her position, character is every thing; and people can only couple your name with hers in one way."

"Aunt—"

"That is all I wanted to say to you. And now I will destroy this wretched scrawl. Are you going into the town to-day?"

Now was the time to make a clean breast of it—now, if ever. It need scarcely be said, however, that Hugh did not take advantage of it.

In effect, he found it impossible. It was not only that Miss Clare was always a difficult person to talk to when she had got some fixed notion into her head; it was not only that she had, so far as she had been able, trained him in habits of passive obedience from his earliest boyhood. It was by no means these circumstances alone that scattered his resolutions of the night and of the morning. It was partly a higher feeling, partly a lower, than was founded upon any aspect of the relation in which he stood to his aunt that had closed his lips.

To begin with the lower. He somehow could not help feeling a little conscience-stricken in the matter; and though a touch of conscience is by no means a proof that a man has done wrong, it is at any rate a proof of his not being satisfied that he has done right. Of course Miss Clare had obviously and utterly mistaken the true state of the case; she had mistaken, not only his intentions, but the very person towards whom they were directed. Now the mistake about the person was not, in itself, of very much consequence; but if she had so strongly objected to the mere suspicion of a flirtation with one of the two cousins, what would she have had to say to the idea of marriage with either of them?

Now there is a theory about *mésalliances* which accounts for a great many things. No man ever feels much offense at the idea of another man's marrying beneath him; but when he hears of a lady running off with a groom, or being guilty of any similar escapade, he is both astonished and disgusted. In like manner, even as men are tolerant of each other's condescensions, and intolerant of those of women, women are not altogether intolerant of *mésalliances* on the part of their own sex, but bestow the weight of their disgust upon such social offenses on the part of men, without considering the unfrequency of the one or the frequency of the other. In her young days, it may be remembered, she had herself been just the person to marry beneath herself merely for the sake of doing something *outré* and heroic; but, full as she was of all manner of prejudices, the condescension of the heir of Earl's Dene to a Miss Lefort would have seemed the depth of degradation, whether he should condescend by way of marriage or no; and she had, in the course of her conversation with him, showed what she thought about the matter as plainly as possible, though less perhaps by the mere words she used than by her manner of saying them. Of course, Hugh could not be expected to share her feelings in this matter, if only for the reason that she was a woman and he a man; yet still, although in addition to this he was full of youthful impulse and she already old, he deeply in love and she full of social pride, he could not help to some extent feeling, though unconsciously, that he had,

after all, been doing something that a lady would instinctively feel to be wrong; and, as a gentleman, he was touched in conscience accordingly, though it might be ever so little.

But, as has been said, a higher sentiment had been also aiding to bring about his silence. He, too, fully admitted that *noblesse oblige*; and he, too, believed in the Clares almost as much as Miss Clare herself could have desired. Not only so; not only did he accept the traditions of his family and of his class for gospel; but he was at heart a good fighter, although of late he had rather neglected the battle in which he was engaged. And now it was certainly not the time for him to make his own affairs a stumbling-block in the way of the victory for which his friends were striving. What he had to do for the present was to fight for victory, though but for their sakes, as though he still cared about it for his own. It was the country gentleman's principle of conduct—to do what was right in his own county, from repelling an invading army to sitting as a silent and superfluous member of his court of quarter sessions; and to consider every thing to be of importance that concerns the spot of earth in which God has placed him. The true importance of the Denethorp election was no doubt very small indeed, but he never thought so; and the serious and earnest pride of Miss Clare, though it did not affect his love for Angélique, yet made him remember that he had something to do, as he considered, for his country, and for the institutions in which he had been taught to believe. Now it was obvious enough that, under the circumstances, a confession to Miss Clare on the spot would be worse than inopportune; and so it was that a little want of readiness and self-confidence, some difficulty in explaining himself, a long habit of respect and obedience, and a great deal of honorable unselfishness, all acting together at the same moment, caused him to hold his tongue.

"Shall you then not be going into the town?" repeated Miss Clare, seeing that he paused.

"No—I do not think I shall. I don't see how I can be wanted to-day. By the way, how splendidly Warden is working for us! White is full of him."

"So I hear; and so I can see, too. It is satisfactory in these days to see a young man of promise who does not think it fine to be a radical. She paused, and sighed. "What shall you do with yourself, then? Ride with Alice?"

But this Hugh could not do. He needed to be alone after his discomfiture; he had to think how he should overcome his aunt's prejudices, and how he should act, when the election was over, if he should find them invincible.

"No," he said, "I have something to attend to here. I don't think I can."

And Miss Clare, as Alice returned to the room in her riding-habit, looked from one to the other, and sighed again.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE next morning Angélique rose with a heavy and anxious heart to hear, as she expected, of her lover's quarrel with his aunt, which, from what she knew of their respective characters, she judged to be inevitable. It was not only that

she feared the consequent failure of her scheme; she feared also the loss of her situation with Miss Raymond—in short, that she would have grasped at a shadow only to lose the solid meat. But the morning passed, and the afternoon, and still Hugh did not come. Had she been really in love with him, she could not have desired to see him more; and it was with a sinking of the heart that at last, towards evening, the servant put a note into her hand, directed in a handwriting which she guessed to be that of Hugh. A groom from Earl's Dene was waiting for an answer.

"A letter from Earl's Dene?" asked Marie.

"Only a note from Miss Raymond," she answered; "I have a book of hers that she wants returned. I must go and look for it. I know I have it somewhere among my things."

As soon as she reached her own room she tore the note open with a trembling hand.

"Dearest," she read, "I have not been able to speak to my aunt yet; nor, indeed, do I think I shall be able to till the election is over. She would be very excited to hear of it, so I had better wait till we have done with the contest. How I wish it was over, I need not say. I am longing to see you, and counting the hours till to-morrow, when I shall come to you, whatever happens—before twelve if I can. I can not believe in my happiness yet unless I see you—it is all like a dream.—H. L."

She both smiled and sighed with relief, and forgot all her anxiety in a moment.

"He is afraid of Miss Clare, after all," she thought to herself. "He will *never* tell her now!"

So she took a pencil and scribbled her answer.

"MY DEAR HUGH,—How strange it seems to begin so!—I have no doubt you will do all for the best, and doubt not all will be well. I can wait—I have trusted you with too much not to trust you altogether now!—A. L."

"Of course I will be in to-morrow morning."

This she carried to the man with her own hands, and she spent all the rest of the evening in a state of temper as angelic as her name.

"Did you find the book?" asked Marie.

"No—I could not find it. I suppose Miss Raymond must have got it herself without knowing it."

But though her own placidity was restored, the rest of the Lefort family had by no means so much reason to be satisfied with the state of things. The teaching work of the old Frenchman had lain principally among the families of the mills—that is to say, of the opposition; and, ever since the beginning of the contest, he had found himself—why, he could not understand—looked upon coldly in all quarters. In many cases, even, his services were suddenly dispensed with. Now the number of French students was of course never too large in Denethorp; and though Monsieur Lefort enjoyed a monopoly of those that there were, a pupil more or less made a considerable difference to him. Even at the best of times he found it sufficiently difficult to get along respectably, and to pay his way. He was obliged to dress tolerably well; he had two young children to feed and educate and clothe: he had to support Marie, who could not be spared from the household and the children to a further extent than that of taking one or two very cheap pupils,

whom she taught with Ernest and Fleurette; and the long illness of his wife had burdened him with many debts. Worst of all, he was far too mild and despondent a man to make a really good fight of it; and he was too blind to see what was going on even in his own family.

Among other places where he taught was a boarding-school, which has been mentioned already, and was kept by a lady whose respectability was of the extreme sort. It was patronized chiefly by the tradespeople of Denethorp and Redchester, and was the French master's best stronghold; for to learn French was there *de rigueur*, as much even as to learn the use of the globes. On this day he had been there to give his lessons as usual; but instead of being allowed, as usual, to go straight to the school-room, he was asked to speak with Mrs. Price herself in her room of state. She was a strong-minded person, rather of the dragon type, like so many school-mistresses of the old style; and she ruled her school as Miss Clare would have liked to rule Denethorp. Her notions of decorum and propriety were terribly strict; and, all together, a private interview with her was rather a thing to be feared, not only by her pupils, but by her teachers also. But the age, ugliness, respectability, and meekness of Monsieur had won her heart; and so she had generally left him pretty well alone.

But now she was stiff, even for her.

"Sit down, Mr. Lefort."

He bowed and sat down.

"I think, Mr. Lefort, you have now known me for some time?"

"I have had that happiness, madame."

"Very well. And you know the school, too?"

"I think so by this time, madame."

"And you are acquainted with the character it bears?"

"That it is of the highest. Yes, madame."

"Character, Mr. Lefort, is every thing."

"Assuredly, madame."

"And do you feel justified, Mr. Lefort, in coming here day after day and week after week to teach in a school whose character is such—is such—as you admit it to be?"

"Madame?"

"I say do you feel justified, Mr. Lefort? That is the question."

"I do not understand, madame."

"I thought, Mr. Lefort, that you were a respectable man. In *you* I did not think myself deceived. But it is not that. I know what men are too well to be surprised at—at—any thing. But you must be aware that as long as your family go on as they do, you are not a fit and proper person to be the instructor of young ladies of respectability."

Mr. Lefort became stiff in his turn. "I must beg you to explain yourself, madame. What have you heard of my family?"

"Oh, you ask, do you?"

"Certainly, I ask."

"All the world knows it."

"And what does all the world know?"

"I blush for you, Mr. Lefort! I blush for your gray hairs!"

"I am not conscious, madame, that I have any reason to blush for them."

"So much the worse—so much the worse, Mr. Lefort."

"But this must be some slander. I will ask you—"

"Ask your daughter, sir—ask Miss Lefort, who is the talk of the whole town."

"*Mon Dieu!* Marie—the best girl in the whole world? For shame, madame."

"Yes, for shame, indeed! Ask her, as you pretend you do not know! And you will please to consider our engagement at an end. I will pay you, of course, instead of the usual notice; and I owe you something besides, I believe. You will be good enough to let me have the account at once."

"A gentleman does not pretend, madame. Yes, I will ask Marie—not you any more, who accuse her and will not say why; and I will not take your money—no, not a penny—not even when you apologize to her, as you will!"

He had some blood left in his dried-up veins, after all; and he dashed out of the room as if he had been younger by thirty years, leaving Mrs. Price petrified and rather doubtful.

No doubt he did well to be angry, though not from a practical point of view, seeing that he had already anticipated the money that he had so scornfully refused. But he changed his mind about mentioning the matter to Marie; he could not bring himself to distress her, as indeed it seemed to insult her, by asking her what it all meant, and he had too much confidence in her to really suspect any thing wrong. He would almost as soon have suspected Angelique herself. The calumny, whatever it might be, must, of course, be traced to its source at once, but not by means of her who was doubtless the most ignorant of its existence. He did not even speak of his dismissal when he got home, but only said that he should not be at the school as usual the following morning. Meanwhile he considered to whom he should apply for advice.

One effect of his not going out the next day was that he spoiled the chance of any thing like a *tête-à-tête* between his niece and Hugh, who came according to his promise. She just whispered to her lover that no one knew any thing about their engagement as yet; a communication at which, in truth, he was more surprised than disappointed.

But he was fated to be still more surprised. He was about to leave after a very short and unsatisfactory visit, when Monsieur Lefort said to him,

"Mr. Lester, should you think me very presuming if I ask your advice about something that concerns myself?"

"If I thought myself able to advise you in any thing—"

"Then would you let me walk with you a few steps in your own direction?"

"I shall be delighted to have your company. I am in no hurry."

As soon as they were in the street Monsieur Lefort told him of his interview with Mrs. Price.

"I could not speak to her any more," he said, when he had finished his story, "and I could not distress Marie. What had I better do to find out what it means?"

Lester frowned angrily. "I am glad you did not mention it to Miss Lefort or to—to her cousin. I, too, have heard something of this. I am ashamed that the Denethorp people should be

such idiots—for myself, I should not care a straw, but if you are to suffer it must be stopped at once. It is to injure me that these absurd stories are put about."

"You, Mr. Lester?"

"Yes; in my election."

"But how—"

"I scarcely like to tell you, it seems so absurd. People pretend to have noticed that I am too much at your house."

"*Eh bien!* and what then?"

"They join my name with that of Miss Lefort, your daughter, it seems; and they have the pleasant and charitable idea about me that I can be after no good."

"Then, Mr. Lester, you should have done one of two things. You should have told me, or discontinued your visits. You should have remembered the value of a girl's good name, when she has nothing else."

"Indeed you wrong me. How could I have done either, when it was only the day before yesterday that the report came to my own ears? And I have not been since."

"But you came to-day."

"Monsieur Lefort, let us understand each other. I did come to-day, but it was not to see your daughter."

"Was it, then, to tell me what you had heard!"

"It was not."

"What was it for, then?"

"It was to see your niece."

"What! Angélique?"

"Yes. I love her."

"*Grand Dieu!*"

"And I would make her my wife."

Monsieur Lefort was so utterly taken aback that he could not speak for many instants. At last he said,

"And does she know it?"

"I have told her so, and she has given me hope."

"And when was this? How long has she known it?"

"She must have known it for long. But I did not tell her so till when I was last here."

"You have done wrong, Mr. Lester—very wrong."

"I hope not."

"You have done very wrong. I know enough of English ways to know that."

"But I am my own master. I am serious in what I say. I mean rightly and honestly. In what have I done wrong?"

"That may all be very true. I do not doubt you mean well. But you should have thought a little of us, I think."

"Oh, what matters the chatter of a townful of malicious idiots?"

"Nothing to you, perhaps. But to us it means ruin."

"But when she is my wife? What can harm you then?"

"In a matter like this, Mr. Lester, you will pardon me for speaking of your own affairs. You have made them mine also. I presume that Miss Clare does not know of this intention on your part."

"Not yet."

"So I thought. No. If you do not consider us, we must consider you. People would blame

us with justice if we were the cause of your ruin."

"But if Angélique—"

"If Angélique is the good and brave girl I take her for, she will see it in the same light that I see it. I will speak to her, and then she or I will write to you. In the mean while do me the favor of coming to see us no more. You can not, with honor, condescend to us, nor we ascend to you. I dare say you will think I say hard things, but you will think better one day. And you must remember that I am old enough to be your father, and that I love Angélique as if I were hers."

"No; I can not consent to that. I can not give her up like this. If she loves me—"

"That can make no difference if she can not be your wife."

"But surely Angélique can judge for herself."

"No doubt. But surely you would not have her judge blindly."

"But if she has decided already?"

"Mr. Lester, this argument will prove endless. As a gentleman I trust you will not come to us while, as you see, your visits are likely to do us a fatal injury. If you do, I shall be obliged to think of you badly, which I am far from doing now. And I should, in my own self-defense, feel it my duty to communicate with Miss Clare. Just think—it is a question now, neither of you nor Angélique, but of Marie."

Lester did think, and then said, frankly,

"I will not give up Angélique. But I will give you my word not to call in Market Street until after the election is over, on condition that you will let me write once to Angélique to explain why. I might do so without your permission, I know; but I wish you to feel that you can trust me."

"And I do trust you. And you shall have an answer."

And so, upon this understanding, they parted, mutually dissatisfied.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN Monsieur Lefort returned home after this conversation, he felt terribly fatigued. His life was one of chronic, monotonous trouble, and the excitement of the last four-and-twenty hours had been too much for him. Little used to the occurrence of any thing unusual, he found himself both physically and mentally incapable of speaking either to Marie or to Angélique of what was upon his mind; and so he drank his coffee in silence, wondering the while how long he should be able to afford himself his only luxury. Angélique was curious to know what had passed between her uncle and Hugh, but the silence of the former reassured her. After all, she had not much to fear from him—he was not Miss Clare. But still she liked things to go on without unpleasant scenes; and if she cared about any thing, she cared for the good opinion of Marie.

She was, however, to a certain extent enlightened as to the position of matters by a letter which she received from Hugh that very evening, and which her uncle handed to her in a deprecating sort of way. When she had read it, she saw clearly that her best course would be to trust to fortune, seeing that she had secured her fish, and

that she could rely upon Miss Clare's being kept in ignorance for the present. After all, if her uncle should make a fuss—and she had never yet known him to do so about any thing—she could manage him somehow; and from Marie she had nothing to fear but an “*Angélique!*”

And so the nomination of the member for Denethorp was brought nearer by another day. Warden had returned from London, and had slept off his fatigue; and Marie had something else to think about than the humors of her cousin. And so, on the whole, Angélique had no very great cause to be dissatisfied. Madame Clare could not live forever, and then—

For his part, Hugh had, during the last day or two, been rather more attentive to his aunt's guest than usual: not by any means of set purpose, or with any intention of throwing dust in the eyes of any body, but simply because he somehow felt that he had not of late paid her as much attention as mere politeness required—perhaps to some extent also on the same principle that makes a schoolboy, who has been guilty of some great piece of mischief which he would rather not have found out, unnaturally well behaved in other respects. Not that Miss Raymond much cared. She liked him very much, but she was by no means perpetually thinking of love and marriage. When she rode, she rode to ride, and not to flirt. The interest which she took in the election itself arose from her being readily interested in every thing that went on about her, and from its interesting her friends, and not from any special cause connected with the candidate himself. Nevertheless, the dust did find its way into Miss Clare's eyes all the same.

But one day, on returning from a ride with Miss Raymond, which had been pleasant to her, and, in spite of his anxieties, not unpleasant to her cavalier, the latter was told that a gentleman was waiting in the library to see him, whose card bore the name of Lieutenant Mountain, R.N.—a name that he recognized as that of a retired naval officer who lived at Redchester, and amused the evening of his days with local politics and agitation.

“I have the honor of addressing Mr. Lester?” he asked, although he knew Hugh by sight perfectly.

“Pray sit down, Mr. Mountain.”

“I call, sir, as the friend of Mr. Prescott.”

“And may I ask what has obtained for me the honor of a communication from Mr. Prescott?”

“I said as the friend—as the *friend*, sir—of Mr. Prescott, who is, sir, as you may be aware, the popular candidate for the representation of this borough.”

“I am certainly aware that he is a candidate, but whether he is the popular one—”

“Mr. Prescott, sir, feels that he has cause to complain of your conduct towards himself personally.”

“I should be sorry to think that. He does not expect me to retire from the contest, I suppose? For, except by opposing him, I do not know what reason I can have given him to complain.”

“Sir, this is a most serious business, and I beg you will treat it seriously. Mr. Prescott feels that you, by yourself or by your agents, have acted towards him in a way not becoming in one gentleman towards another.”

“Sir!”

“You will understand, sir, that I desire to proceed in this affair with all courtesy. Perhaps, sir, you may not—I say you *may* not—be aware that there has been published in this town an infamous libel.”

“I am perfectly aware of that; but I should hardly have thought that Mr. Prescott would have charged me with attacking my own friends.”

“Am I to understand, sir, that you deny all knowledge of what I allude to?”

“You may understand that I don't understand a word you say.”

“I allude to this, sir.” And he produced a copy of Barton's last performance, which had been flying about the town all day, but had not as yet found its way to Earl's Dene.

Hugh read it.

“And does Mr. Prescott mean to say that he can think me the author of a thing like this?”

“Mr. Prescott, sir, has reason to believe that he knows who the author is, and he has excellent reason to believe that you know who it is as well as he. And he thinks, sir, that it is an infamous publication.”

Hugh considered for a moment. “Could it be Warden himself?” he thought. It did not seem to be unlikely. But as he did not choose to guess,

“Well, it has been published now,” he said, “and can't be unpublished again. What does Mr. Prescott expect me to do?”

“He demands an immediate apology, sir, for this slanderous and unjustifiable attack.”

“An apology? How can I apologize for what I know nothing about? I am sorry it appeared, of course; but really I think that he is the very last person who ought to complain of it.”

“An apology, sir, and an immediate suppression.”

“He must know, Mr. Mountain, and so must you, that suppression is impossible. And I have done nothing that will admit of an apology.”

“Then, sir, do I understand that you refuse to apologize?”

“Most distinctly.”

“On your own responsibility?”

“On my own responsibility—whatever that may mean.”

“Are you aware, sir, that in that case there can be but one termination?”

“If Mr. Prescott thinks I have wronged him, of course I am ready to give him proper satisfaction.”

“Perhaps, sir, you had better consult some friend. I shall remain at the King's Head, Denethorp, and will give you two clear days to consider. If by that time I hear from any friend of yours that you are still in the same mind, or if I do not hear from you at all, I will consider that the rest of this affair is to be arranged in the only way that will then be open to my principal.”

“Will you take any refreshment, Mr. Mountain?” He rose to ring the bell.

“Good-day, sir. And I trust you will think better of it by to-morrow.”

And so, to add to his difficulties, he found himself engaged in a duel with the rival candidate. “So we may not have to go to the poll, after all,” he said to himself, and then wrote to an acquaintance of his at the Redchester Barracks, asking him to meet him the next day.

It will seem at first sight absurd enough that so apparently slight a matter should assume what would be held in these days so serious an aspect. The license of an election excuses—or at least used to excuse—much hard and even foul hitting. But this case was exceptional, as might very easily indeed be proved were the effusions of Dick Barton fit to appear in type. There is a limit of insult beyond which a candidate for a borough, long-suffering as he must needs be, can not be expected to stand; and Prescott was not only the reverse of long-suffering, but it was just his sorest corns upon which Barton had deliberately trampled in such a manner that no man, at least in those times, could possibly let the matter pass without resenting it. On the other hand, though Lester entirely disapproved of Warden's proceeding, and was himself entirely innocent, he felt himself bound to support his friend through thick and thin, in respect of what had been done in his own service; and besides, he considered that Prescott was the last man who had any right to complain. At all events, he felt sure that his opponent, even if he had had any just reason for complaint, had not the faintest right to any thing approaching an apology, and less even from Warden than from himself: and so he was more than ready to stand by the consequences of refusing to give one. And so, what with Prescott's very natural anger—seeing that he had been tricked and rendered ridiculous by means of his own weapons—and what with Hugh's chivalrous determination to bear upon his own shoulders the whole responsibility of a proceeding of which he entirely disapproved, only one termination of the quarrel was possible. Indeed, if the truth must be told, his chief feeling about the matter was one of vanity at being engaged in his first "affair."

The next day, Captain Seward—who, by the way, was the last man in the world to counsel peace—conveyed Hugh's final answer to the King's Head; and a meeting was arranged to take place in a convenient meadow about halfway between Denethorp and Redchester.

The interval between a man's first challenge and its result is apt to pass very much as though it were part of a dream; and as such, at least in the case of Hugh Lester, it ought to be described. Nor is the dream altogether of an unpleasant kind, in spite of what sober-minded people may think, when one has hot blood in one's veins, and is convinced that it is the right and chivalrous thing to do. But hot blood is apt to grow feverish, and fevers have their chills. And though love by no means makes a man less inclined to fight, but rather the contrary, it does make a man less inclined to be killed.

He could not help regretting, as he walked about the place at night, on the eve of the meeting, his promise to Monsieur Lefort that he would

not attempt to see Angélique, for now it was quite on the cards that he might see her no more—that he might have to leave the world without even bidding her farewell. In answer to his last letter, he had received the slightest and most clandestine-looking of notes, reassuring him of her patience and trust in him; and upon this he had lived for many days. But now his soul required stronger meat than written words, which had been read and kissed until their sweetness had grown almost stale. And his desire was all the stronger, since it could not possibly be gratified. He had written five letters in case of accident—one, full of explanation and of gratitude, for Miss Clare; one to Warden, full of thanks and exhortations to fight the battle still upon his own account—making him in effect his political heir; one to an old college friend, full of kind remembrances to every body; one to his servant, full of commissions; and one to Angélique full of love. But this was but a sorry substitute for what he longed to say and do, after all; and his cigar tasted bitterly. Nevertheless he slept well, and in the morning was as cool and as well prepared as a man who thinks he is doing his duty should always be. In fact, the morning was always his best time.

An early hour had been fixed for the meeting, and he found Captain Seward waiting for him with a trap at the bend of the road beyond the bridge.

They drove off rapidly; and the freshness of the air soon put Hugh into unforced spirits. They had not a very great way to go, and they found themselves the first on the ground.

Presently, however, from the opposite direction, came up another trap, containing Lieutenant Mountain, a surgeon from the barracks, and the great Mr. Prescott himself.

Both the captain and the lieutenant were pretty well used to the business; and as the last resort was now inevitable, the forms and ceremonies were got through quickly, and the two opponents were soon in their places, waiting for the signal to fire.

Now, Lester was an admirable shot, and knew it. Of course he did not aim to kill, but he must aim to win, almost as a matter of self-defense. He fired, but, in order to avoid the chance of killing, gave himself too wide a margin, and missed altogether.

Had he conspicuously fired wide, his opponent might very likely, under the circumstances, have thought that enough had been done for honor; but, as it was, the latter having seen the general direction of his adversary's pistol, aimed straight and low.

The next instant Hugh was lying in the arms of the surgeon. The ball had passed into his side, and he seemed, in the eyes of all, to be faint with the faintness of death.

BOOK II.—MARIE.

CHAPTER I.

A MAN's real birthday is not the day on which he first opens his eyes to the light of the sun. It is that on which the sunshine first pierces a little farther than his outward eyes.

At all events I like to say so; seeing that the latter, in my own case, is the only birthday that I am able to keep. For any thing that I know to the contrary, I may be as old as the Great Pyramid, and have passed the first few thousand years of my life in a slumber from which I one day suddenly woke up to see—some clothes hung out to dry in a back garden.

Not a very striking introduction to the waking world. But what would you? Every body must see something first; and it is not given to every body to find their self-consciousness for the first time in a storm or in a battle. Of course, if I had my own way I would give my memory a more poetical origin; but, as I have not my own way in the matter—indeed I have, in the course of my life, had it very seldom, except in my very earliest years, when I had it rather too much—I must be satisfied with facts, however unpoetical they may be. Besides, I might have done worse. These same clothes—petticoats and such things—were not, I remember, without their merit as a spectacle to untried eyes, whether in point of color, or of the form bestowed upon them by the wind, as it shook them and puffed them out into the semblance of the wave-line of an angry sea: and I distinctly remember the rhythm of their flapping—an unmusical sound which, however, has been suggested to me a hundred times since by music in many cases as devoid of either body or soul as the clothes themselves, but which has often, for that very reason, affected me, not by any inherent suggestive power of its own, but by calling to mind a thousand other things.

Many a soulless sound has since—heaven knows why—by carrying my memory backward over what is by this time a very long period of years, summoned up before me, in no ghost-like fashion, the undulations of familiar hills, the springiness of their turf, the whiteness of their winters, the sunshine of their summers—in a word, that strange, mysterious, magical odor that is at once suggested by the words, "my own country." I wonder whether it is given to those who, as I consider it, have the misfortune to be born in great cities, so really understand this feeling—whether the Parisian or the Londoner finds in the multitude and variety of his stench any thing similar in effect? For my part I believe they do; and that, had I also been city-born, the smell of many chimneys, for example, might bring as dear and as sadly pleasant associations to my heart as the special perfume of my own woods and hills. For, as the voice is to the man or woman, so is this subtle aroma of the past to places; and the voice of his mother sounds harshly to no man.

At least I suppose not; for in this matter I must confess myself personally ignorant. Even as, in point of age, I might, for aught I know, be the contemporary of the Pyramids, so, in point of parentage, I might be of no woman born.

Who my father was, however, I *do* know—at least I have been told. He was no other than the Marquis de Créville, who had been feudal lord of the place where, on the principle I have laid down, I consider myself to have been born; and I have also been told that I was, or rather should have been, in the bad old times, heir to his title and lands. As things actually were, however, I found myself heir to nothing but to his name and to his principles, which, I am proud to say, seem to have been those of no marquis of the old *régime*, but of a citizen of France: of one who is the willing subject of no royal accident. Such also am I, Felix Créville, Frenchman and musician: such, in spite of much sorrow—ay, and worse than sorrow because of it—I have always been proud to be; and such I am content to remain, until a few more years lead me at last, as I hope they will, to join that mother in heaven whom on earth I have so ignorantly loved.

Amen. But to return to the clothes-line period, now so long ago, and yet still so near.

Childish recollections are strange things—strange in their very monotony; for, in spite of circumstantial differences, those of most men are pitched pretty nearly in the same key. The color that the universe assumes to the eyes of one young child is always much the same as that which it assumes to another, however much the form may vary. Whenever I have, in the course of conversation upon this subject, happened to compare notes with people of any sort or kind or country, high or low, rich or poor, I have always found that there is as much essential community of experience in this respect as in dreams, even although almost every one, as in the case of dreams, tries to make out his own to have been something singular and abnormal. At any rate, I can safely say, for my own part, that I have never even found in books any account of childish experiences—of course I do not mean in point of outward detail—with which I have not been able to sympathize personally; and I know that in this I am very far from standing alone. Indeed I firmly believe that this would prove to be universally the case were it not that so many people forget the childhood of their minds and of their souls altogether. To remember one's past self as one really was, and as one is no longer, requires a faculty that is far from being universal; for it requires the faculty which, when joined with a power of expression, makes the poet. Without going so far as to claim for myself that title, I do hope that I may claim to call myself something of an artist in my own line, which comes to much the same thing; and, if I am at all an artist, I feel that it is because I am still the same Felix

who was once, according to my system of autobiographical chronology, five minutes old.

Thus my own country, my old home, and the effect that they produced upon me by developing me into what I am, are still a part of my present self. Still part of me are those green valleys and wooded hills, alternately so beautiful and so desolate: still part of me, if not myself altogether, are their sounds—their various music of brooks, of rivers, and of torrents; of warm breezes and cold winds; of their birds, of their cattle, and all the notes and harmonies of the symphony of pastoral nature. Still part of me, also, are their discords: and, of these, above all, the howl of the wolves in winter, which always used to fill me with a peculiar and nameless terror, the source of which seemed to belong to some previous state of existence. But this is not all. There were the people also, few enough and kind enough for me to know them all both by and with my heart. It needs not the slightest effort of memory for me to recall the forms and voices of "*Grand'mère*," as I used to call the stern but bravely patient peasant whom the country round knew as Aunt Cathon; of my foster-mother; of the good curé, who was to me more than a father; of the lame wood-carver, who almost made a sculptor of me; of my playmates at Eaux-Grandes and Les Vacheries; of our dogs, both christened Loup, whom I fear I was ungrateful enough to my human friends to love as well as I loved any one; and, above all—above man, woman, or dog—that laziest, cleverest of village ne'er-do-wells, whose violin introduced me to a music that is almost more to me than that of nature herself. I have thought, sometimes, of composing a *fantasia* on the subject of that fellow and his tunes, only no one could be expected to appreciate it but myself, and for me it would be too sad a task now. If, however, I ever do any such thing, I shall call it "*Pré-aux-Fleurs*," and tell no one why.

I remember, also, that I was looked upon in the village as a sort of superior being, if only for my father's sake. No one ever once scolded me, that I can remember, under any circumstances: and I am sure that if I was ever guilty of the weakness of crying for the moon, as I have no doubt I was, it was not the fault of my friends that it did not become mine. Every one, I fear, spoiled me, and "*Grand'mère*" most of all; and I believe that to this very day I might have gone on living upon the charity of the place, thinking it quite right and quite in the natural order of things, had it not been for the curé and the fiddler. The former taught me to read and write, to decline *Musa*, to be a good Catholic, and to remember that, peasant as I had become, I was a French gentleman after all—a fact that, in spite of my republicanism, I was, and am not, unwilling to remember. The latter, who was called Jean-Baptiste, taught me to play the Marseillaise—which I infinitely preferred to *Musa*—to sing a song or two, and to keep time to one or two lively dances. Nearly half my time I spent with the one teacher, and nearly half with the other; and though I know whose company I then most preferred, it would be difficult for me to say upon which of the two I look back with most affection now.

Nevertheless, in spite of the education that in one way and another I managed to pick up, it *naturally required some external circumstance of*

a very decided nature to prevent my settling down in some way or other as a peasant of Saint Felix-des-Rochers—for so was the parish named. It is true that the conscription might have turned me into a soldier of the empire. But otherwise I should very likely have married one of my playmates—I think I know which it would have been—and settled down into the proprietorship of a *châlet*; while my violin would have succeeded that of Jean-Baptiste as the enlivener of weddings and festivals. I believe, too, that in my ignorance of all external life I should have been happy. But I do not, can not, regret that such was not to be my lot: for who would give up his experience even of sorrow?

One day—for I did not see my few playmates very often—I was wandering about alone in the neighborhood of Pré-aux-Fleurs—or rather I should have been wandering about alone had it not been that I was accompanied by Loup the second and by my violin, the present of Jean-Baptiste, who was the possessor of more than one. I can scarcely say that music was a passion with me in those days, for I could always be entirely happy without it; but it was an amusement to which I took at least as kindly as to the more ordinary pursuits of my age. Nor can I honestly say that it at that time ever stirred up any wonderful emotions within me. A sad tune used to make me feel sad, a merry one, merry—and a well-managed modulation would make my nerves creep and glow a little—but that was all. In fact, such airs as I knew were not of a character that was likely to produce any greater effect; although, no doubt, where there is genius, it may be called out by any thing, however slight. But then to genius I have not pretended for many years past. Nevertheless, my violin was my constant companion; and I should as soon have thought of leaving the house without it as without my dog himself. On this occasion the weather was hot, and I presently grew tired of rambling; so it was the most natural thing in the world that I should sit down by the road-side where I found myself, and amuse myself quietly in my favorite fashion with Loup for my audience—or rather not quietly, for he always howled most delightfully whenever I played certain passages that he seemed to find sympathetic.

I was so interested in this occupation that two strangers approached without my observing them, until I suddenly heard a loud burst of laughter within a few feet of where I was sitting.

Now it was not so rare as it had once been for strangers to be seen in the neighborhood during the summer; for the picturesque had of late years begun to come into fashion, and it was no rare thing for artists and other tourists to find their way among us from Besançon, and the other towns in the same part of France. From my own small experience I could see that these two were tourists of one sort or another, amusing themselves by walking through our beautiful hills instead of posting along the dusty highroad.

"*Bravissimi!*" exclaimed one of them—a tall, dark, and handsome man of about fifty years old, with bright black eyes. "That dog will be an acquisition to the *grand opéra*."

His companion, some fifteen or twenty years younger, and of a short, stout figure, was one whose hair, eyes, lips, and peculiar turn and carriage of the shoulders—that only infallible sign

—marked him out as one of the house of Israel.

"Too many of them there already," he answered "and of both sexes. This one certainly wouldn't be the worst of them, though. But we seem to have come upon a brother artist, besides the singer. Just play that again, my boy, will you?"

I was much too spoiled a child to be shy, and so I stood up and played willingly and at once. But Loup was not shy either, and spoiled the effect considerably.

"Do you never play any thing but accompaniments for *Maestro Lugubrioso* there?" asked the short man again.

"*Plait-il, M'sieur?*"

"I mean, does your dog always howl like that?"

"No, M'sieur—only at what he likes."

"Then play us something that he doesn't like, please."

I obeyed.

"Well done, my boy. But that isn't quite the right way, though," he continued; and then, taking my violin from me, and having put the strings in order, he *did* play.

After all, then, I had never heard music before!

"Oh, play something more, M'sieur—please!" I exclaimed, excitedly, when it was over.

He smiled, and then began something else. I felt the hills floating away before my eyes into infinite space. Who could this man be? and to think that my own poor fiddle should be capable of producing such sounds as these!

At last that also came to an end, and with the cadence my soul seemed to sink away also. I could not have spoken to save my life, and stood spell-bound.

"And who taught you to play, my boy?" asked this wonderful being.

"Who taught you, M'sieur?"

"Ha, ha, ha! You seem a strange fellow. If you wish to know, it was a certain stupid fellow they call Moretti."

"And where does he live?"

"Where does he live? In a place called Rome, if you know where that is. But why do you ask?"

"Because I will go to Rome!"

The two strangers first stared at me, then at one another, and then laughed again. I felt angry.

"I suppose, M'sieur," I said, "if he has taught you he can teach me too."

"Hm! That depends, my boy."

The tall man now addressed me for the first time; and he spoke gravely and kindly. "Play me something else," he said: "something slower, if you can."

"Pardon me, M'sieur."

"Why not?"

"Because I will never play again until I have learned."

"That is to say you will never go into the water until you have learned to swim? So be it, then—never mind. What is your name? Do you belong to this place? Is this how you get your living?"

"Felix Créville, M'sieur. I live at Pré-aux-Fleurs—there up the hill."

"And do you get your living by your fiddle?"

"No, M'sieur. I live with Aunt Cathon and Mère Suzanne."

"And can you read?"

"Yes, M'sieur."

"And write?"

"Yes, M'sieur."

"*Bravo!* You are a fine fellow. Have you a father—a mother?"

"I never had either, M'sieur."

"You must have come into the world somehow, though. And how old are you?"

"I do not know, M'sieur."

"Ah, I see. And so you want to learn the violin?"

"I *will* learn it, M'sieur."

"That remains to be seen. How have you managed, so far?"

"I have not learned, M'sieur."

"How? You did not find it out by yourself, I suppose?"

"Ah, M'sieur! I know nothing. That is not playing."

Poor Jean-Baptiste!

"Well, so be it. And do you think Aunt Cathon or Mère Suzanne could find us a draught of milk at Pré-aux-Fleurs?"

"Oh, M'sieur!" I had hopes of more of that wonderful music from the stout violinist, who had been silent while the other was talking to me.

"Show us the way then," continued the tall stranger. "What shall you do with this franc piece?"

"I shall give it to Jean-Baptiste!"

"And who is Jean-Baptiste?"

"He gave me this violin. He taught me—what he knew."

"Ah! Give it him then, by all means; and this 'also," he added, increasing his gift. "He must be a clever fellow, this Jean-Baptiste, and we will see him too, as well as Aunt Cathon and Mère Suzanne. And now we must be acquainted. This is my friend, Monsieur Prosper; I am Signor Moretti."

CHAPTER II.

AND so it came about—though my excitement at the time confuses my memory considerably as to the exact details of the ensuing weeks, that the nature of my career in life became fixed. I was to become a musician, and was to learn my art in Paris. As to pecuniary means, I fear—I very much fear—that Father Laurent, in the course of the conversation which he held with my two new patrons, and of which I did not hear a word, but in the course of which I presume he was persuaded that my departure from my home under their auspices would prove the best thing for me, deceived them very considerably; and that I, ignorantly and unconsciously, robbed him of the greater part of an income from which, one would have thought, he could spare nothing. Nay, I fear also that I must thereby, to some extent, have robbed his poor.

Among the many faults of my nature of which I am conscious, I do not reckon ingratitude. On the contrary, a kindness even from a friend always weighs me down with a sense of obligation to such an extent that I scarcely like to receive a favor without an immediate prospect of returning it with interest, and fills my heart with an almost dog-like feeling towards him who confers it.

And thus I can never recall this period of my life of which I now speak, child as I was, without undergoing a pang of regret, almost of remorse.

I had hitherto lived as my own dog had lived—that is to say, in an atmosphere of kindness, bestowed upon me so freely, so much as a matter of course, that I, consciously at least, appreciated it no more than I consciously appreciated the fresh air of the hills. I could not, of course, have been kept and fed for nothing, and my peasant friends must often have found the times hard enough for themselves without an additional mouth to feed; and now, to crown it all, the curé was depriving himself of what, judging from the slenderness of his purse, must have been almost necessities of life, in order to benefit me and give me a chance in the war of the great world. And yet, in spite of all this, and in spite of the affectionate sorrow that filled the whole place for days, and *Pré-aux-Fleurs* for weeks, before my departure—a sorrow that filled my own eyes with sympathetic tears—I was glad and eager to leave my home. It was a perfectly natural eagerness, no doubt, and I knew no more about the part that money plays in the world than I knew of the world itself; but I can not, in my soul, excuse myself to myself, however much my unconscious ingratitude sprang from the innocence that belongs to ignorance. Alas! once more I fear that I found it really hard to part from none save Loup; and I was, with all my new artistic ambition, child enough to repent of the career I had chosen, when for the first time I had to go out of doors without him. The appealing look of mute wonder in his eyes when I, for the last time, embraced him and forbade him to follow me, haunted me for long; and all the more as there seemed to be something of rebuke and of warning in it. I used to imagine his long and weary waiting for my return, settling down at last into the chronic dullness of a vacant life, such as crushes the nature of dogs even more than that of men; but I did not picture to myself, as I do now, Aunt Cathon and Mère Suzanne with the occupation that formed the one excitement of their hard monotonous peasant life forever departed from them; Jean-Baptiste, weary of his fiddle, and perhaps consoling himself for the loss of a comrade, for whose sake I can see now that he had long kept himself within bounds, by a return to his wild ways; the curé, without his pupil, and with his time heavy upon his hands. I am not guilty of vanity when I picture to myself all this. I know now how much love was mine in my old home.

Any one who knows any thing of musical history will not need to be reminded that Signor Moretti was the greatest violinist and one of the most eminent composers of his day. Even still, in what I can not help thinking to be degenerate days, his works contrive to hold their own. But, although I owe it to him that I became a musician, it is not my good fortune to be able to boast myself one of his immediate pupils. His light just shone upon me, and that was all. He lived in Rome; and for hundreds of reasons it was impossible that I could follow him there at once. But in Paris I found myself in good hands. I was the pupil of his pupil, Monsieur Prosper, for whom at first I entertained a shy dislike, owing to his brusque manners, his capricious temper, and propensity to ridicule; but it was not long

before I pierced through the shell, and, according to my nature, came to feel a love that, born of gratitude, ripened into friendship.

Of course it will be understood that I am now beginning to refer to days long subsequent to my bewildering journey to Paris, the events of which are, like those of the days immediately preceding it, far too dream-like to make a detailed narrative of them possible. All I know is that I did arrive somehow, and was soon immersed in hard, dry exercises, that often made me repent, not almost, but altogether, of my ambition, and long for the liberty which I had enjoyed hitherto of making as many imperfect notes, slips in time, and barbarous graces as I pleased. I found very soon that music as an amusement and music as a profession are very different things. Still, however, I worked hard; and if I had not done so willingly, Monsieur Prosper would have made me do so against my will. He was the first person who ever really scolded me, and that is a real and startling experience in the life of a spoiled child.

He was certainly a good teacher, though he had but little enthusiasm even for his art, which he regarded strictly as a profession like any other profession, and as being, after all, or rather above all, a means of making money. He treated it accordingly; and the result was, that while he did not, perhaps, know how to bring out any genius that might be latent in any of his pupils, he did most thoroughly teach all of them how to make the most of themselves in the way that the world admires. He had no crotchets, and scorned all systems that did not bear the seal of success. And yet he himself, with all his common sense and all his Hebrew blood, was by no means a prosperous man. He was not content with living by his profession—he must needs become rich by it; and so he became, in effect, less an artist than an *impresario* and theatrical speculator. In this capacity he had plenty of knowledge and plenty of boldness; but these good qualities were altogether neutralized by want of tact, want of temper, and want of capital. I am not quite sure that he was not at one time even director, or joint-director, or in some way mixed up with the direction, of the *Grand Opéra* itself; certainly when I knew him he was always dabbling in a dozen theatrical affairs at once, with the very worst results to his own pocket. Sometimes, even, he was reduced almost to the very last straits; but, like the rest of his race, he was never at his wit's end, never lost confidence in himself, and never relaxed in his energy for a moment even at the worst of times. He was by no means liked in the profession, but I never heard even his worst enemies throw a shadow of suspicion upon his complete uprightness in all matters of business. If it were the case, as unhappily it is not, that success is always to be gained by working for it and deserving it, he would have died a millionaire.

This would have been a strange person to become my friend, were not that friendship almost always contains an element of strangeness. I was still a boy; he almost middle-aged. I held transcendental views of life and art; he was an artistic adventurer. I thought only of the soul of music; he of little but its form. I was quiet, romantic, dreamy, and reserved; he, bustling, prosaic, energetic, and self-reliant. For some

reasons it was well, for others not so, that I had a friend of this kind. At all events I learned a great deal from him and through him, not only about my profession, but about its professors. Connected as he was with almost all of them, my acquaintance with him laid bare to my unwilling eyes the wretched intrigues, the contemptible jealousies, the atmosphere of sordidness, of stupidity, of charlatanism, and of cant, the conventionalities and all the sickening littlenesses with which the glorious art of music was then and still is so utterly enveloped as to be almost suffocated. I learned that if an artist wishes to "succeed," as it is called, he or she must, in order to do so, lay aside all the better part of himself and become, as the Germans say, a rank Philistine. I learned that almost all who style themselves artist are either hucksters or charlatans; that their critics are for the most part much the same, only with a stronger dash of dishonesty; and that audiences consist almost entirely of flocks of silly sheep, whom *clagues* and critics lead by the nose. If I seem to speak strongly upon this matter, I am glad of it. I would speak more strongly if I could; and I could do so without suspicion, inasmuch as I do not pretend that I personally should have succeeded any better than I have done even in a better state of things. Now, this early insight into the nature of the world in which I was henceforth to move, while it proved far from useless to me, was the cause of my losing a considerable amount of enthusiasm; and loss of enthusiasm for his art is the worst misfortune that can befall one who aspires to be an artist in any form. It was impossible for me not to lose a great deal of mine when I knew, for example, that some great *prima donna*, whose whole genius, or rather whose whole stock in trade, consisted of a tolerably good voice, neither worse nor better than that of nine women out of ten, had gained her public position by the path of private protection; that the enthusiastic crowd which took her horses from her carriage and drew her home in triumph consisted of supernumeraries of the theatre; that the applause that filled the house was originated and regulated by hands hired for the purpose; that the shower of bouquets thrown upon the stage were the lady's own property hours before they lay at her feet; that the critics who described it all in such glowing terms knew all this as well as, perhaps better than, I knew it, were even more ignorant of music than the audience, and wrote from no higher motive than love of their friends and hatred of their own and of their friends' foes. I fear it is only too true that they not seldom wrote from very much lower motives. I remember, to cite one instance of what I mean, a certain leader of criticism in my own time, by whose power scores of reputations were made and marred, who, whenever a singer was about to make a first appearance, would call and say, "Signor," or "Madame," or "Mademoiselle, I have already prepared three notices of your performance of to-morrow evening. The first, as you see here, is sufficiently favorable, and will insure you a *succès d'estime*: it is yours for so many francs. The second, which I also show you, clearly proves you to be the greatest singer of the past, of the present, and of the future: it is yours for so many francs more. The third, which it is unnecessary for you to see now, you may have gratis; but, if

it appears, I do not think that you will care to sing in Paris again." I do not, of course, mean to say that in all countries musical criticism has attained to such a pitch of sublimity as this, or that in any country critical dishonesty is always of a gross and conscious kind. But I certainly do say that it needs every note that has ever been produced by true genius to prevent me from hating my art as much as I despise my profession. "It is an ill bird that fouls its own nest," they say; but in this case I am not ashamed to be called an ill bird.

But I am in effect anticipating; for my blindness was of course not removed immediately. I knew far too little of things or of people to lose the enthusiasm of my nature immediately; and for long I worked on in the belief, not only that my own merit was great, but that in art-matters merit must necessarily achieve success. Now, indeed, I should be very much tempted to say to any singer, composer, or other musician who asked me for the secret of success, "It is simple, and it is this: do not deserve it; for no man can serve two masters, and the kingdom of art is not of this world." Whether the same advice would be equally applicable to poets and painters, I know not; but I am sure, from long experience, that it applies to musicians. But I dare say that it does apply to all equally; that, in order to succeed,

"Musician, or painter, or poet,
We must speak as the world may choose,
And for truest worship—show it
In silence to the Muse;"

and that what the Muse chooses and what the world chooses are two very different things indeed. Of course I do not mean to say that good men never do succeed; on the contrary. But then it is by having other qualities besides merit.

I need not say that in those days I was poor enough; and that, as I grew in years and stature, I developed into a Bohemian of that famous tribe whose capital settlement used to be the Latin quarter. But of this part of my life I will say little, for Bohemia is Bohemia all the world over; and it would be unnecessary to describe it to those who have sojourned in it, and impossible to those who have not. I will only say that in those days the Latin country was in its glory, for they were the birthdays of the great romantic *renaissance*, or rather revolution, in art and literature. Of course I was romanticist, heart and soul, and the word "classical" stank in my nostrils. In this respect I should very much like to chronicle some of my recollections, for the period is still replete with interest and importance. It was, of course, not the fortune of an obscure musical student like myself to see much of the heroes of that time, but still I could not help coming to know a great deal about them at second-hand. But I will refrain, for it is of myself that I am speaking now. With regard to myself, then, I added to my musical practice the scribbling of much highly unclassical verse—of which, I am ashamed to say, the stanza that I have just quoted is a specimen—the growth of long hair, and, in general, as Byronic a style and demeanor as I could manage within my limited scope. I also, in a small way, liked to be considered rather a dangerous person, and longed to experience a *grande passion*. What was practically more important, I obtained through Monsieur Prosper a small theatrical engagement and a pupil or two of my own, and I have every rea-

son to believe that my master was satisfied with my progress. Before very long I found myself justified in thinking that I might be able to carry out my childish impulse of visiting Signor Moretti at Rome, which had, ever since I had formed it, been the height of my ambition.

Every body can point back to some particular period of his life as being distinctly the happiest; and the period of which I am now speaking was mine. I worked hard, I really loved my art, I was full of hope and confidence, my personal wants were few and easily satisfied, I had many acquaintances, some friends, and much pleasure. If my purse was light, my heart was lighter still.

But one morning—how well I remember it!—when I was attending a musical rehearsal at the theatre, Monsieur Prosper came up to me and said,

“I am getting to have too many irons in the fire, I am afraid. I have not time to attend properly to half of them, what with one thing and another. I must send off a few of my pupils, unless you will help me. I can turn over some of them to you very easily. For instance, there is the *pensionnat* of Madame Mercier. You don’t profess the piano, of course; but you’ll do very well for a week or two. I ought to go there to-morrow; but, as you know, my mornings are all otherwise engaged for a fortnight at least, so it is impossible. Will you take them off my hands just for the present? It will be worth your while.”

Of course I consented willingly; nor do I remember that I experienced the shadow of a presentiment of what was to come of my consenting to render Monsieur Prosper so apparently slight a service.

CHAPTER III.

On arriving punctually next morning at Madame Mercier’s, I found that I had to give three lessons. My first pupil proved to be wholly uninteresting, in every respect: indeed I can scarcely recall her to mind. The second was a young English lady, whom I remembered well for many reasons, although but little for her own sake.

The hour which I had to devote to the latter had nearly expired when the door opened, and another young girl entered quietly and sat down in a retired part of the room, as though to wait until I should be disengaged. I just looked round for a moment, and saw that she started a little—I suppose that she had expected to see Monsieur Prosper. More than that, however, I did not see just then, for she to whom my immediate attention was due was in the midst of a difficult passage, and making a mess of it. But, when the lesson was over, I certainly did see something more. I do not know to what extent my face betrayed my admiration: to some extent, however, it must have done so, for she blushed a little as she courtesied to me, and then without a word walked straight to the piano. I did not hear her voice until she began to sing.

Neither was the voice in itself, nor was the use that she made of it, very wonderful; nor was it even of a kind that I in general used to find sympathetic. Usually I care nothing for a voice, however beautiful it may be in other respects, that *has not depth and shadow*; and hers, although

musical, was wholly without either. And yet somehow—how shall I possibly make myself intelligible?—it seemed to be sympathetic to a side of my nature that had never hitherto revealed itself to me save by dim and momentary flashes. Like certain other sounds, like certain colors, like certain odors, it seemed to speak of a life other than that which I always remembered to have lived since I was born: to be associated with one of which I was mysteriously conscious, but did not consciously remember. It carried my heart backward beyond the reach of memory altogether, and threw me into that state in which one is forced to believe in the doctrine that the soul lives, and enjoys, and suffers before it is born.

It was this, I think, even more than her great beauty, that made this third hour to rush by so rapidly, and myself to be filled with such a glow of strange happiness at its close. Of this my first interview with her I have of course nothing to say that can be expressed in definite words. Outwardly, it was nothing more than a mere ordinary music-lesson. But, in reality, it seemed to me to be nothing short of a revelation, though of a vague unintelligible kind; nor did I care to make it clearer to myself, or to understand it better. I only felt that I had found my ideal, even though, as is always the case, it had proved to be altogether different from the ideal of my imagination.

I do not know whether my experience is singular or not. Judging from what men say, the special kind of sympathy which we call love is for the most part born unconsciously, and apart from any effort of the will. But I did not “fall in love.” I sought it, and threw myself into it consciously and intentionally. As I have already said, I was in search of a *grande passion*—of a heroine for all my dreams of romance: and if I had not found this particular heroine, I should inevitably have found another. But my temporary pupil had the advantage of fulfilling my whole ideal to perfection; and I think that she would have rendered me faithless to any heroine whom I might have fancied that I had found before seeing her. If I had had a Rosaline, as I had not, she would have proved my Juliet. She was beautiful beyond all question: she was herself romantic: she was a lady: she was herself to be an artist: and—not the least of her merits in the eyes of one of my character—she was poor and dependent: so that she was at one and the same time both my superior and my equal. Hitherto my acquaintance with women had been confined to our good comrades the *grisettes*, who had none of these advantages, excepting that of poverty: but now—

Well, as I have said, I chose her for my heroine deliberately and almost in cold blood: really, I believe, at first because I thought it the right thing to do. But, alas! “*On ne badine pas avec l’Amour*.” The more I came to see of her, the more my feeling towards her became less and less a matter of vanity, or even of mere admiration. Before long I forgot myself in her altogether. This is not a mere phrase: I mean literally what I say, let the reader shrug his shoulders as much as he pleases at the notion of carrying sentiment that is not born of passion to so extreme a length. I know that in this frigidly philosophical age no one ever suffers himself to feel an emotion that is inconsistent with prudence

and comfort: I know that the extreme of sentiment shares a well-known quality of the sublime, and that the flights of sentiment in which the poets of another age used to indulge, have come to be regarded as mere ornaments of a sort that has gone out of fashion, and that never at any time represented any thing true or genuine. In so far as men now consider the desire of possession to be, after all, the ultimate cause of what is called love, I agree with them; but, at the same time, I know from my own experience, that in my own case love for a woman may be born in mere sentiment, and that mere sentiment may so continue to give it power and life, that passion may play a part that is so slight as to be indeed imperceptible. I certainly first of all loved, because I wished to love; and I continued to do so, because she whom I loved filled all my thoughts and all my fancies in a way with which mere passion could have had nothing to do; and this kind of love I hold to be the most overwhelming of all. Passion may be directed, if not conquered; but he is lost who becomes the slave of a dream.

After all, though, I dare say that almost every man, if the truth were known, has a romance of the same nature hidden away somewhere, even though in other respects his life is written in the plainest of prose. On this assumption I will cease to defend myself and my theories about this matter further. In any case I think I have said enough to show what I mean; and the subject is far too vague and complex to tempt me to go into it more deeply.

At any rate, without thinking of consequences, without even putting my hopes and wishes into shape, I indulged this new feeling of mine to the very utmost. I even continued to encourage it, even when it was full grown; and deliberately, something in the spirit of the Knight of La Mancha, sought to come up to the ideal of the lover of romance. And it was not long before I could not help seeing that the love which I had not as yet dared to declare, but yet had been unable to conceal, was far from being scorned.

How long in reality this state of things continued I am wholly unable to say. It must have lasted more than a moment and less than a century: but even so much certainty as that I do not derive from memory. But at last—again just after a rehearsal, and while I was putting my violin into its case—Monsieur Prosper, who was also present in some capacity or other, or, more likely, in several capacities at once, came up to me again. I had not seen much of him of late—indeed, for that matter, I had not seen much of any of my old friends for some little time past.

"Well," he said, in his usual abrupt manner, "and how did you find things going on up there? Are they in want of a *primo tenore*? Because, if so, I think we have just been listening to one that is quite out of his place among us poor mortals."

This was one of his ways of making enemies. He had a special knack of delivering his sarcasms just when they must necessarily be overheard by those at whose expense they were made.

"What is that you say, Monsieur Prosper?" asked our own *primo tenore*, who had just finished a grand *aria*, and was now passing us on his way out.

"Ah, pardon. I did not see you. I was only remarking to Monsieur Felix here how splendid-

ly you brought out that *Ut de poitrine*—it was superb. It was really a shame that every violin in the place happened to be sharp at that exact moment. How was it, Felix? But you have not answered my question. Is it true that they believe in Rossini up there? Or have the mad doctors belied them?" Rossini, by the way, in his character of innovator, was, as a matter of course, a special aversion of Monsieur Prosper in those days before Paris had accepted him.

"Up where?"

"In the moon, of course. You have been there so long that I thought you were going to stay there for good. My dear fellow, where in the world have you been all these weeks, that nobody has seen you?"

"My friends must have been very blind, then. I have been at the theatre every night."

"Ah, that is good! I have certainly seen some one not unlike you sitting in the orchestra—but yourself, no. And if I were you, and wanted a double to receive my salary for me while I was visiting the planets, I would at all events get one that would do me credit—who would neither cut my friends nor play out of time. Ah, it must be a big orchestra for me not to tell which instrument it is that is doing the mischief."

I generally took his scolding in as good part as it was meant. But this time I sympathized with the *primo tenore*. I was about to reply a little sharply, when a grave and strangely kind look came into his eyes, which made me silent at once.

His words, however, were less kind than the look which accompanied them. I do not think that he had the power of speaking quite seriously, even when he wished to do so.

"My dear Felix," he said, "whether you have been to the skies or not, I can not help thinking—do you not feel it yourself?—that there are symptoms about you of the *Anges sans G.*"

I guessed what he meant immediately, and have no doubt that my face showed that I guessed it. I colored with the shame that every one feels when he finds that the romance of his life is seen by worldly and unsympathetic eyes.

"I dare say there are," I said, as lightly as I could. "There are about most people, in one way or another."

"Yes—because they're born so; and I should never dream of quarrelling with them for it. On the contrary, I approve of the arrangement. But your ears are not long by nature, my dear boy—at least not so very long, that is to say."

"Thanks for the compliment."

"Look here. You mean to be an artist, don't you?"

"Of course I do."

"Well then, I've known a great many artists in my time—a great many. And I've also known a great many men who had the stuff in them, and might have been artists, only—"

"Well?"

"Only some took to drink, and some took to—you know what I mean."

"Indeed I do not."

"Yes, you do. Flirt as much as you like: women are charming creatures, especially coquettes; and it's a useful excitement. I do it myself whenever I get the chance—and I do get the chance sometimes, though I'm not exactly *beau garçon*. Have as many liaisons as you

please: it's the best way of getting to learn the world and how to keep straight and safe in it, if you can spare the time, which I confess I can't. But, in the name of thunder, keep clear of a grand passion! I know something of such things; and I know a great deal about you. And I tell you, I, Louis Prosper, that no real artist ever cared for a woman above his art—that is, above himself, which is the same thing; and that is what you seem to be in a fair way of doing. You are quite capable of it. And I won't have my best pupil spoiled before my eyes by the best she of them all, if I can help it."

This was certainly a little too much for me to stand. "And what—" I was beginning, when he interrupted me by laying his arm upon my shoulders while he shrugged his own.

"Ah, you think me a stupid old fellow?" he said; "but you are wrong. It is you who are the stupid young one. This wonderful she is to be your loadstar, and all that sort of thing, is she not? I know. But what would you? Perhaps you have not thought? Eh bien! I have thought, though."

"I do not see what business it is of any one but myself."

"Perhaps you don't. But it is. Do you think I say all this for the sake of your own *beaux yeux*? Bah! not Louis Prosper! Perhaps you will think next that he has not been teaching you for his own sake? A likely thing, indeed! *Corpo d'un cane*! I thought better things of you, my dear Felix, than that you should risk your career for a fancy—as you are, I can very well see. I know you. You will end either in the Morgue or in marriage; and either way there will be an artist spoiled. Come—think of me: think of Moretti. Do you think he made his concerto in A sharp minor by falling in love? Not he—it was by keeping his brain clear and his heart whole; and yet he was a man *aux bonnes fortunes*. But then a *bonne fortune* is not a grand passion, you understand? Do you think that I made my—~~be~~ a man. Take some little Pauline or Adèle ~~from~~ the *corps de ballet* to make you comfortable till you can afford to look higher. There are plenty who would jump at you in this very house, not to speak of elsewhere, and who would not expect champagne every day. Stick to your fiddle, crop your ears, send love to his father, who is the devil, and come and dine with me. *Sole Normande*—cutlet *financière*—a salad—a glass of Yquem? Will that suit you? And, by-the-way, I shall be able to go myself to Madame Mercier's again now. Never mind, though, you shall have another pupil to make up. *Au revoir*, mesdemoiselles. Come, Felix, I have forgotten my breakfast long ago."

But I was by no means grateful for his intended kindness.

"Thanks, Monsieur Prosper," I said, as coldly and stiffly as I could, "I have an engagement;" and walked away in a rage.

He shrugged his shoulders once more. "I must dine alone, then," I heard him say to himself. "Poor fellow! It's always the way. Yes, it's quite true—women are the devil; there's no doubt about it."

Monsieur Prosper was certainly not a man of tact. His advice had been altogether well meant, but it had, as may well be supposed, jarred upon me altogether. It was not that I objected to it

in the least from a moral point of view, although, no doubt, I ought to have done so; for the atmosphere that I had breathed since leaving my old home was certainly not less free than that of the latter, and infinitely less pure. My childhood was not strict, to say the least of it. But this rigmarole, as it seemed to me, of flirtations, *bonnes fortunes*, marriage, the Morgue, Moretti, the *corps de ballet*, and *sole Normande*, was wholly out of harmony with the key in which my life seemed now to be set unchangeably. If he had actually mentioned her name in the same breath with all these things, I do not think I could have borne it. As it was, I almost think that though Monsieur Prosper was my friend, and I knew it, I for some minutes knew what is meant by the word hate. Had some evil genius just then transported us both to some quiet spot in the Bois, and changed our bows into swords, I think I should, at all events, have gone so far as to cry out "*Ea garde!*"

As I am speaking of what I felt at this moment, I may as well finish. It almost invariably happens, that when one feels most strongly, one is then most liable to be impressed with any grotesque image that may chance to present itself. The intense absurdity of the idea of Monsieur Prosper being made to flourish a small-sword almost made me laugh aloud as I walked along, and certainly made me repent of the manner in which I had parted from him. But, at the same time, though I did him justice in this respect, I was unconsciously harboring a feeling which lasted more or less strongly for days, and which was far less excusable than my anger. I felt a positive disgust for music—not as a profession, but as an art and as itself—for my friends, for every person and for every thing, in short, that had happened since I had left my true home. And why? Because, forsooth, I was the Marquis de Créville, and Monsieur Prosper was only a Jew fiddler! The blood which I had derived from ancestors, not so far back as the common ancestor of us all, but from knights and barons of the Crusades, from *Maréchaux de France*, and from fine gentlemen and finer ladies of more recent times—each and all of whom would have treated him as a creature that might be useful and amusing enough in his proper place, but, to gentlemen and good Christians, otherwise unclean—seemed all of a sudden to rebuke me for having not only made this man my friend, but for having made him my friend to such an extent as to have given him a right to find fault with me, and for having allowed him to degrade me to a position which they would have regarded as being no higher or better than that of a mountebank. And what was this thing called art, after all, if it could only be served by a man's throwing himself under its chariot-wheels, and sacrificing to it all the best part of human nature? What but a Moloch, worse than the Baal of the world? Prosper's whole doctrine had disgusted as much as his manner of stating it had offended me: and as I could argue neither against the truth of what he had said nor against the merit of his intentions towards myself, I had to throw myself back upon my fictitious superiority of rank and race, and to soothe myself with the absurd consciousness that I, as a gentleman born, must needs have finer feelings and truer instincts than he. And so, perhaps, I had; but assuredly not because I had a claim to call myself Marquis,

while he was an artist and nothing more. Certainly pride, or, as I should prefer to call it, vanity of birth, must be a very ineradicable thing if I, who have, as a good child of the Republic, believed in equality and fraternity from my cradle, was guilty of so gross a lapse into it as this; and if it often takes such a form as it did with me then, it must be as contemptible as it is ineradicable.

Before evening came, my heroine had heard from me the whole story of my love. The next morning, in all the intoxication of triumph, I told Monsieur Prosper what I had done. But he only shrugged his shoulders once more, and said nothing.

And now followed a season, not of happiness, but of glorious fever. I loved and was loved; and, as if that were not sufficient, mine was a love of which the course must needs be any thing but smooth. It also had—though I scarcely know how or why—an element of mystery about it that made it more exciting still. I think that we both preferred that this should be so; she certainly did. So my whole time became taken up with contriving meetings, in looking forward to them till they came, and in thinking about them when they were over. Most people, I doubt not, would have called me dissipated, while I was a sufficiently good fellow among my comrades, and would have considered that a serious passion had steadied me; for the free life of my friends was mine no more. What they thought of me I do not know, for I never cared to know. It was now that I was really dissipated, both morally and intellectually. I still studied a little, but no longer in the spirit of a student; for my heart was no longer in any thing that had not reference to her. I have heard of such a passion producing an opposite effect; of its acting as a healthy tonic, and not as a poisonous stimulant; of its leading men to do great things and to make the best of themselves. But I did not find it so; and so far, at least, Monsieur Prosper had not proved to be wrong in his estimate of my character. Indeed I am, on the whole, inclined to agree with him in holding that the less a would-be artist has to do with really serious passion, the better for him as an artist. By serious love I do not, of course, mean the passion that endures for a season only, however strong it may be while it lasts: I mean that which colors a man's life and changes his character: I mean that which by its very nature can never bear good fruit. After all, the cultivation of art depends, more than any other human pursuit, upon the even and harmonious working to one and the same single end of the brain, of the senses, and of the soul. The greatest artists of modern times have been just those whose natures have been the least disturbed by external influence: some, by reason of a strength that has enabled them to throw off emotion at will; others, by reason of an incapacity of receiving any emotion not in harmony with their true selves. And so it will be found that the cardinal doctrine of the gospel of Art, as of the gospel of Christianity, is the subjugation of external nature; and that before a man can rightly express human emotion and its results, he must not only cease to be a slave to it, but become its master. Very few are born masters: not many are born freemen. And so let not the artist love too well: let him be-

ware of going beyond mere passion, which passes, and friendship, which strengthens and does not disturb. I own that this is a cold, a disagreeable, and an unpopular creed; but then truth is apt to be cold, disagreeable, and unpopular. He who would be a priest of the temple must submit to lead a life apart from other men. It may be that he can best express emotion who can feel it most; but then he must use his power of feeling as a slave—not obey it as a tyrant.

But since in my case these considerations came too late, and love had proved himself conqueror, why, it might be asked, did not these two, if they were really in love, do as hundreds of others have done in their place? Why did they not honestly make up their minds, poor as they were, to fight the battle of life bravely side by side, and to bear all things for each other's sake until, for each other's sake, they had gained what the world calls victory?

Yes, but I was living in a dream. I never thought of, or realized, any thing except that I loved and was loved. She had no friends to compel me to think of what was right or wrong, wise or foolish. There was no one to bring me to a pause with a sudden demand to know what were my "intentions"—that is the right form, I believe—and a man who is blindly in love is not very likely to ask himself his own. Who, indeed, shall give reasons for what he does or does not do in a dream? And what man who really loves ever has "intentions?"

One wet and miserable morning—do I not remember it well?—we had met in the gardens of the Tuileries, which was an occasional place of rendezvous for us as for many another pair of lovers. She was looking marvellously beautiful even for her: indeed it is as I saw her then that I like best to think of her, and none the less that her beauty was increased by a slight shadow of sadness—in spite of which she made full amends for the absence of the sun.

Of course I told her so, but did not call a smile to her face. On the contrary, she, instead of heeding my words, gave me her hand to hold and began herself to speak.

"Oh, how shall I tell you what has happened?"

Her tone was more than enough to alarm me too much to allow of my doing more than question her silently.

"Miss Raymond has just told me that she leaves Paris. What is to be done?"

"That she leaves Paris!" I could only say, with a sinking heart; for I somehow felt a presentiment that this meant the end of my dream—that I must answer her question about what must be done.

"It is only too true. She is going back to England."

Now if I had been capable of looking forward at all, I should have known that this must have happened sooner or later. But then I had not been capable of looking forward. In my heart I had been fancying that the present was to last forever; and so the news came upon me like a blow that made my heart stand still. That I must actually have turned pale and faint I could read in the sudden look of anxiety that filled her eyes.

"When did you hear this?" was all I could manage to say.

"This morning."

"And that you go with her? Surely you can not mean that?"

"I must, dearest Felix."

We were silent for a full minute. Then I said, "Do not go, remain here—be my wife."

I dare say that I spoke coldly and quietly; for words are always cold and tame when the heart is full. The tongue has a pride of its own; and when it can not express all, it prefers to express nothing. But then, when the heart is full to overflowing, there is no need of words. Doubtless my eyes spoke for me—at all events I looked with so much eagerness of anxiety as to see the "yes" for which my soul longed hanging upon her lips. But it did not reach my ears.

"Why do you wait to answer?" I went on, suddenly and quickly; "are we not one already, in every thing but in name? Surely Miss Raymond has no claim upon you now, when we belong to each other. Tell her, then, that you can not go with her to England; that you can not live in one land while your heart is in another. Have you not said so to me many times? As for a year or two of poverty, that shall be our pride! We will conquer the world together, which will conquer us if we part; and to part even for a time, without seeing an end to our parting, is to risk every thing without need. We two, who live outside the world and scorn it, must not make marriage and love a question of so many francs. Do you give me the present, Angélique, and I will answer for your future! and I will find strength and courage for both. It is for your sake I ask you: if you wish me to be worthy of you, if you ever wish to be proud of me, you must give me the power, and you must give it now. Did I not tell you that you were my sun? and would you suddenly plunge me into darkness, when you might, with a word, make me all, I swear to you, that even you could wish me to be?"

"And you are not strong enough to wait—to trust me!"

"To trust you?—forever! But to wait? No—when there is no need—when you can come to me now. Is it you that are not strong enough to trust me? Do you not believe that with you I can do all things—without you, nothing? Angélique, I will not lose you, if I can help it, even for a day; for without you, a day would seem eternal. I have asked you for your own sake—I now ask you for mine. Stay with me—do not let us risk the good part of our lives lightly: nothing calls you away. Oh, Angélique, what can I say more than that I will live for you forever—that you *shall* be proud of me, and that my life is in your hands?"

She had started when I first asked her to remain with me; and during the rest of my appeal she had never raised her eyes. Now she gave a deep sigh, and I felt the hand, which I still held closely, tremble; but instead of saying "yes," she only answered,

"But I must go now."

And nothing more than this, in spite of all that I could say, could I obtain from her. Indeed I must confess that my own arguments were bad enough, in all conscience. I could only promise her a life of poverty, to say the least of it. I could only endow her with the wealth of a future that had as yet given no tangible sign; and I could not *justifiably*—as any sensible person would hold

—ask her to give up her life of comfort and luxury in order to live in some poor garret in the midst of my not very reputable theatrical surroundings, from which it must needs be not a few but a great many years before I could even hope to emerge. I fear that the impulses of love are often terribly selfish, even when they are the purest and the most sincere. She said nothing about this, of course. I, consciously at least, did not think it; but I must have known in my soul that I was doing wrong. But still, right or wrong, for her to leave me and go to a land of which I knew nothing—where any thing, for what I knew, might happen—where she might die, where she might forget me, where she would at least be surrounded by a new atmosphere, by new scenes, by new faces, and, worst of all, by new admiration—the thought was simply unbearable. He who loves as I loved, must, it seems, be jealous of something; and I was now jealous of England—of the whole world. And so I continued to urge her, though against all right and reason. But it was in vain.

Nevertheless we did not part so. It was to be our last meeting; for although Miss Raymond was not to set out for England immediately, she was to leave Paris at once. And though my mistress would not grant my desire for an immediate marriage, I had no reason otherwise to complain. She convinced me that it was from no want of affection that she withheld her consent; and our last words were vows of eternal faith and constancy, whatever might happen.

And so the first part of my dream came to an end. I saw her again, indeed, several times before she left the French shore, but only from a distance. But very soon I lost even this poor consolation, and then Paris became a desert to me indeed.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE was once upon a time a certain philosopher who, by the mere exercise of his will, could die whenever he pleased; could put himself into a state of trance, during which his soul, like all living souls, retained its own individuality, but wandered at large into infinite space and infinite time, where there are no special conditions of life and energy; where there are no parts or atoms, but all things are merged in one vast whole. We realize much the same kind of sensation whenever we enter the great city of all great cities.

In every other place we live. Every other spot of earth has an individuality of its own; and when we are in any other spot than this, we also have ours, consciously felt by ourselves and recognized by those about us. Every other place is a place of traffic, of pleasure, of history, of study, of torpor, or of some one of a hundred other things, as the case may be; and every inhabitant of it is more or less in keeping with its characteristic quality in an understood and appreciated degree—in a word, can feel himself, and feel and be felt by others, so as to have a separate existence from the mass. But London has, of all places in the world, the power of absorbing existences, and of merging them in its own. It is more a city of pleasure even than Paris; more of traffic than New York; more of history than

Rome; more of study than Oxford; more of torpor than Denethorp. And it is all this, and the opposite to all this, and a great deal else besides, at one and the same time. No one can possibly feel his own individual existence. On entering the universal city he is lost in the whole, like a rain-drop in the sea; like the soul of Hermotimus in the soul of the universe itself.

Doubtless it is a glorious sensation, even though it may considerably diminish our self-conceit, to quit the small for the great; to exchange our own narrow bodies for the vast body of humanity itself. But it is not quite so glorious a sensation when this vast body, as multiform in its aspects as Proteus himself, chooses to assume to us its most evil guise; when it wears the aspect of infinite hunger and of infinite cold. Then a man would fain still further imitate the philosopher in question by recovering once more his separate, his individual life, however narrow and confined it might be, and however miserable; for it is better to feel, if starve one must, that one at least starves as a man, and not as a mere atom of a vast starving machine. It need scarcely be said that Felix was not among those to whom a return to his old life was possible. He had chosen to follow his fate to London; and now he must drain whatever cup he might find there, whether of gold or of gall, and whether he chose or no.

Certainly luck had so far been against him; for his present position could not be called altogether the result of imprudence. Had the theatre not been burned, he with his few wants and solitary manner of existence could have lived on as well, in a pecuniary sense, as he had lived in Paris, and have dreamed of future fame and thought of Angélique as well here as there. As time went on, too, his position would doubtless have improved, for he was really a skillful and promising musician; and if merit seldom "succeeds" by its own force, it seldom altogether fails. But now he was, by the destruction of the house at which he was engaged, entirely thrown out of work; for engagements are by no means so plentiful as those who require them—at least they were not so in those days, whatever the case may be now. Besides, he had of course long since spent the small sum of money that he had brought with him from Paris. He had saved nothing; he had lost his violin; and he had made no friends who could be of any assistance to him.

Of course there were many others worse off than he. He was not burdened with a wife and a dozen children; he was not in feeble health; he was not seventy years old. Surely he thought to himself that night, as hundreds and thousands of young, healthy, and unburdened men have thought before him, there must be some way of getting a living, even if in order to do so he should have to desert his profession for a while; and before he fell asleep, as he did, and soundly, he had come to grieve for his violin, not as for a good instrument, but as for a dear friend; for its own sake, that is, far more than for the daily bread which it represented. None but the artist can tell how dear to the heart that mysterious thing called a musical instrument may be which use and association have endowed with what seems like sympathetic life; with a soul made up of all the fancies and all the passions and all the thoughts with which its strings have trembled since it first was made to speak. But there is consolation

in thinking that a not inglorious death has saved what we love from danger of desecration: whatever might prove to be the fate of the master, the soul which his hands had made was safe among the stars. And, now that he was put to it, and with this thought for a consolation, after all, he came to think also, there are many worse hindrances in the way of winning the world's battle than that of having nothing to lose. Must not the man inevitably conquer who has to choose between victory and death? With Angélique true to him, what would he not do? Love and the instinct of self-preservation—the poetry and the prose of life—came to his aid, and filled him with the full courage which is the last thing that a man should lose. Nor did the morning bring about a reaction.

But, alas! courage, youth, health, and independence are not talismans. Even they, united, can not without external aid obtain employment at a day's notice; nor, very often, for a great many days. And then Felix had disadvantages. He could scarcely speak English, and he had lost the only instrument that he knew how to handle. And so, after three or four days of ineffectual search and exertion, he began to feel his courage ooze away with his physical strength. Love and fame, indeed! He was fast reaching a condition in which he would forfeit the highest throne in the palace of art, and Angélique to boot, for bread, and yet be neither the worse artist nor the worse lover. "*Omnia vincit amor*," say the poets; but they are wrong, as those who have known what the word hunger really means know well. *Omnia vincit fames*, they should say; only it would not be pretty—and, besides, it would not scan.

After all, to say this is not to prove so guilty of treason to romance as might at first be thought. In these days love has ceased to hold a monopoly of romantic material. Poverty competes with it on terms which, to say the least of it, are fully equal; even as the story which the winter forest has to tell, which brings no tears indeed, but fills the heart with barren desolation, is to the full as effective as the song of a spring flower. Hunger, as the handmaid of poverty, has a romance of its own—and a terrible one too.

There is a well-known natural impulse that leads men to the scenes of their great disasters as well as to those of their great crimes. Thus it happened that, after having spent the greater part of the next day in aimlessly wandering about the streets, Felix, towards evening, found himself once more in front of the *débris* of the theatre. Nor did he find himself there alone; for the impulse that had brought him thither had brought many of his companions in misfortune to the same spot. He conversed with several of them, and more than once had occasion to regret on their account—though not, as yet, for a moment on his own—that he had refused the charity that had been offered to him last night. The very few shillings that he had still about him were very soon his own no more; and he began to long for the purse that he had scorned. While talking with one of the most unfortunate of the victims of the fire, and thinking this very thought, he felt a slap upon his shoulder; and on looking round suddenly and rather angrily, saw the easily-remembered form of Barton himself, as fresh from his hearth-rug as a child from its cradle.

"Why, man alive!" said the latter, "do you mean to say you've been standing on this very spot ever since yesterday?"

Felix, wholly unversed in English types, and remembering the incident of the purse, not unnaturally took Barton for some eccentric millionaire. It is true that the man was shabby in appearance; but then there is nothing incompatible in general seediness with millionaireism—rather the other way. If a man is particularly well dressed, it is far more likely that he carries his capital upon his back, than when, by carelessness about dress, he implies that he has no need to cultivate personal appearance. So he made him a polite answer, and, in the course of a conversation that followed, took occasion to explain to him the case of his companion. In a trice Barton's hand was in his pocket, which, it will be remembered, contained just ten guineas besides the contents of Mark Warden's purse. In another second it was as empty as when he left Shoe Lane. The unfortunate scene-shifter stared at the gift, as well he might; but not having the same scruples as Felix, did not for a moment refuse it. He was about to express his gratitude, when Barton interrupted him.

"Damn you!" he said, fiercely, "if you say a word I'll pitch you among the bricks. Come," he said to Felix—"come and drink. That infernal prig Warden made me mix my liquors last night. A bad habit, that; it makes one so dry in the morning. What shall it be? The customary small beer? Or what do you favor on such occasions? I myself always take a hair of the dog." So saying, he took Felix by the arm, and led him to a bar close by, to which the fire had brought a considerable increase of custom.

Barton asked for brandy, and made his companion have some also, whether he would or no. Then he had some more. Then he entered into general conversation with the other customers, and treated them liberally, never forgetting himself. At last he put his hand into his pocket in order to pay.

"By the daughters of Danaus!" he said to Felix, "cleaned out again! Just lend me half a crown, will you?"

Felix felt in his also; but he knew beforehand that the search would be vain, and so it proved.

"No good, is it? Never mind. Just step outside; and, when you see me come out, do as I do. Tom—another go."

The barman turned to execute the order; and scarcely had Felix passed the door when Barton dashed out at full speed, calling to him to follow. He did so mechanically, until his new friend, having dodged round several corners, suddenly stopped, and broke into a boisterous laugh.

"Give me your hand," he said; "we're brothers, though you *are* a Frenchman. I always swear brotherhood with a man whose pockets are empty. Bad policy, no doubt; but I never knew a good fellow yet who hadn't empty pockets, or a man with empty pockets who wasn't a good fellow in one way or another. I think we gave them a good view of our heels just now. Well, well—it won't hurt them for once; I've paid them many a long score in my time. But I say, old fellow, I am positively cleaned out. My name's Barton—called Dick Barton by his few friends, and something else Barton, which I *won't tell you*, by his many enemies—of whom

some say he is himself the worst. But that's neither here nor there. What's yours?"

"Felix Créville."

"All right. I like to know what a man likes to be called. For the rest, the fewer questions one asks any man the better. Where shall we go now? I feel prodigiously inclined for a steak; but my credit's run dry just now. How are you off for that useful commodity?"

It was lucky for Felix that he was quick at guessing, for Barton's English was not well suited to unpractised foreign ears. "I know no place," he answered.

"I thought every fiddler got tick as a matter of course—as drunk as a fiddler, you know, all over the world; that's because a fiddler can get his liquor for a tune, and can drink all day long, if he likes, for nothing. But as you don't know any place, we must use our wits, that's all. One can't stand here forever. Talking of standing, a good thought! Let's take to the road."

"To the road?" asked Felix, puzzled.

"Yes; cry 'Stand and deliver!'—gentlemen in distress, you know—ha, ha, ha! Claude Duval was your countryman, wasn't he? Any way, Turpin was mine—and a namesake too, by the way. Which shall it be—Hounslow or the Scrubbs? Any way *we* shall be safe, whichever way we go. '*Cantabit vacuus coram latrone victor.*'"

Certainly if Felix had at first fancied that he had found a millionaire, he was sufficiently undeceived. But his heart also was apt to warm to an empty pocket; it certainly warmed towards one who had shown himself so free-handed when his pocket had been full.

"I am myself without a *sou*—without a penny," he said, "and I do not know how to get one. And I must leave my lodging; my landlady will need to be paid. But I have yet a piece of bread in the cupboard, and perhaps part of a sausage—"

"Well, you *are* a good fellow, though you do call yourself a gentleman! I consent. I'll eat half your bread and a quarter of your sausage; for needs must when the devil drives. And then, why, we'll go forth and conquer or die, like brothers in arms. What else have you got besides the bread and sausage?"

"Nothing."

"I don't mean to eat, you know. A watch, for instance?"

"No."

"Nor I. Furniture?"

"No."

"Nor I. Books? No? Nor I, bar my old Horace—but that's to be buried with me. But, damn it, man, you must have something. Every body has something. How many shirts have you?"

Felix stared considerably, and colored also—for his wardrobe was by no means extensive.

"How many shirts?" he repeated.

"Yes, how many shirts—more than one, I mean? Two?"

"I have two."

"*Bene!* One more than I have. Good condition?"

"Nearly new."

"Then, *Optime!* My one is not, by any manner of means. What else have you?"

"Some music—"

"Not worth a straw."

"A hat—"
 "Not worth two straws. Hats never are. Well?"

"A valise—"
 "That'll do!"
 "And that's all."

"And your violin? Ah, I forgot. That fire last night was like Mantua—*nimum vicina Cremona*. All right. One valise, one shirt—that'll serve for to-day, with strict management; and hang to-morrow! Where do you live?"

The question was a breach of the etiquette that considerably treats as a sacred mystery the dwelling-place of a man who has confessed himself to be without what is even more necessary than a dwelling-place. But Felix answered it.

"Come, then. Let us first consume the bread and sausage. What luxury! to keep two whole shirts all at once. Lead on. I am devilishly ready for that bread and sausage. Well, well, such is life; grilled bones and port last night, to-day a mouthful of sausage and—porter. Positive yesterday, comparative to-day, perhaps to-morrow superlative—who knows? Any way, I suppose that at least the comparative goes, as you say in France, *song dire*?"

"I am afraid it does not, though. I have shown you the limit of my hospitality."

"Then a mouthful of sausage and thirst. For your noblest element, as some philosophic ass called it, I have a certain dislike that I can not overcome; or rather, I have such reverence for it that I would put it to no such profane use as that of drinking. I shall die, sir, as my grandfather before me."

"And how was that?"

"Sir, my grandfather was an honest north-country farmer, who entertained that reverence for water which I inherit. I may say, in passing, that I inherit nothing else, except the name of Barton. He was a fine old fellow. I was not born in Lilliput, as you see; but he would have beaten me by a head and neck. One evening, after market-day, he was thrown, or possibly he fell without being thrown, from his horse upon the road, face downward. He was perfectly conscious, however, and found that his face had fallen upon a rut, in which lay two tablespoonfuls of yesterday's rain—just enough, in fact, and no more, to cover his lips and his nostrils. Sir, in order to breathe as freely as you or I, he had only to suck up that water and swallow it—it would not have been more than half a mouthful. But no. 'Not a drop of water have I drunk these sixty years,' he says to himself, 'and I won't bring shame on my gray hairs by beginning now.' Sir, the consequence was that he was literally drowned in those two tablespoonfuls of water—a martyr to principle. I hope I shall not choke myself with your sausage; but if I do, may I not prove unworthy of my descent from my great ancestor. And so—but here we are."

After having disposed of the contents of the cupboard, Barton took the valise and the shirt to the nearest pawnbroker's. Presently he returned, threw down a shilling or two upon the table, and then, by their side, set two bottles of brandy that he had procured with the remainder of the few shillings that he had raised.

"And now," he said, "we'll make a night of it!"

CHAPTER V.

It was in company with this strange specimen of a tribe of Bohemia with which Parisian experience had not brought him in contact, that Felix was introduced to those extreme depths to which allusion was made in the last chapter. That men do somehow manage to exist in those depths without actually drowning is certain; but how they do it is a mystery even to themselves. At one time they only had one coat between them, so that when one had occasion to go out, the other had to stay at home. For income Felix managed to earn a few shillings from time to time by copying music, and Barton displayed great genius in the borrowing of half-crowns; but then the latter were generally absorbed by brandy before they reached the common purse. At last even this unsatisfactory method of supply came to an end; for the world will not keep on lending half-crowns forever. The most intimate friendship will not stand it; and Barton was not a man who made intimate friends. And then the brandy began to run dry also; and then Barton, having slept through three miserable days, without eating or speaking, woke up and said,

"I say, old fellow, this will never do. I've staid with you because I liked you, and because you offered to share your last bite with me, and because I thought I could help you up again; and here have I been knocking under to this damned liquor, as usual. It won't do, and shan't. You're a damned good fellow, and I'm a beast—that's the fact. So I've been thinking what could be done. I thought I might go back to Cambridge, and take pupils; I don't suppose they've forgotten my iambics there yet. But then I know I should infallibly come to grief there again just as I did before; and, upon my soul! I don't think I could stand the place now, any more than the place could stand me then. So then I thought of literature. I've done a little in that line already; and I know I could do well enough if I could only stick to work. So let me have the coat this morning, old fellow. I'll go and call upon a man I know at the 'Trumpet,' and one or two other places. I must get hold of a nip of brandy somehow, just to screw me up to my day's work, or else I shouldn't be able to say a word to any one; but, bar that, I swear I won't touch a drop for another three days—unless it's absolutely necessary, as it is now."

In this way did he talk when he was sober. But as soon as he did get some work from the "Trumpet," and had been paid for it, not another stroke of work would he do till the coin was spent, and he had slept himself sober again.

But editors and publishers, used as they were to this kind of thing in the good old Grub Street days, still could not be expected to stand it any more than other employers of labor when it prevented the labor being done. Barton's work was admirable, and even excellent; but he soon began to find that less and less was required of him, until at last he found himself once more on his last legs, and once more with nothing to drink.

Felix meanwhile toiled like a slave, and sought for toil like a free man. But though the want of energy and self-command, which in Barton amounted almost to a disease for which he could not be held responsible, are doomed to fail, it

does not follow that sobriety and industry, and willingness both to find work and to do it, are doomed to succeed. Felix was overwhelmed by the destiny that had mated him with such a companion. Why, then, in the name of that destiny, did he not free himself from the burden of one who had no claim upon him, any more than he upon Barton? They were a strange pair, to find themselves in this situation together. It is true that both were Bohemians—but this was the only similarity; and Bohemianism is not a quality that makes all who profess it necessarily brothers. And yet these two, diametrically opposite as were their characters and circumstances, in all respects save one, had now been living together for weeks as though they had been far more than brothers—that is to say, as though they had been friends. At first, no doubt, Felix had been to a certain extent passive in the matter, and had rather submitted to than sought the companionship of a man whom he could not in the least understand. It was not likely that the French musician, who knew nothing of the world save its artistic side, and that in an un-English fashion, could comprehend, far less appreciate, one to whom the artistic side of the world was wholly non-existent; who classed all musicians under the generic title, which he always used contemptuously, of “Fiddlers;” whose whole soul seemed to be absorbed in Greek, of which his companion had no knowledge—and in getting brutally drunk, with which he had no sympathy. Still he not only endured this comradeship, but could not help feeling a sort of real affection for the comrade in his difficulties whom chance had given him. Besides, every man has his follies; and Felix, most assuredly, had great ones. For instance, he knew perfectly well that, had Dick Barton actually been the millionaire for whom he had at first taken him, as many of the million pounds as he pleased would have been his own; and that the same would have been the case had it been a question of sharing not a million pounds, but two farthings. So he committed the folly of taking the will for the deed. Again, it was part of his Bohemian gospel that a man is quite justified in turning his back upon a prosperous friend, but that to desert even a chance comrade when he is down in the world is as base a thing as a man can well do. So he committed the wild folly of standing by Dick Barton, as he felt sure that Dick Barton stood by him in point of good-will. And so it was that he had, in effect, to strive his best to make work, which was insufficient to support one, support two—if, indeed, Barton can be held to count for no more than one. As for Barton's motives, who can or need ascribe motives good or bad to such a man? And after all, far stranger relations between men spring up than this—not, perhaps, in respectable society, where they associate according to form and rule, but certainly in that vague and ill-defined outside world in which they go against form and rule by preference.

But still, bravely as Felix toiled, and bravely as Barton talked of toiling, it was not long before the two friends fell into so deplorable a condition, that a day or two at most must inevitably see them numbered among the lodgers of the *hôtel à la belle étoile*.

“I say, old fellow, this will never do,” said Barton once more, as he instinctively reached

out his hand to where the bottle of brandy ought—or rather ought not—to have been.

Felix looked up from his copying. Assuredly no one could have recognized in the worn face, with its pale color, sunken cheeks, and dim eyes, the development either of the peasant of the Jura or of the Parisian art-student. His coming to London had proved a wild-goose chase indeed, and something worse.

“The London press is in the hands of idiots,” Barton went on. “I could conduct it all single-handed ten times as well as it is conducted now; and they know it. And yet they won't throw me enough work to keep body and soul together. The fact is, I'm too good for them. I should rout out their damned cliques, and frighten the fools out of whatever they have in the place of their wits. The fact is, a man should never be quite so clever as his employers, and I'm a long stretch cleverer than mine. Upon my soul, I think I shall enlist; and if I get run through or knocked on the head by one of your damned Frenchmen—why so much the better for Dick Barton. Here lies Dick Barton, who never did anything because he did every thing too well—*Nepioi, oude isasin hoso pleon hemis pantos*; that'll do for an epitaph. By-the-way, I've got to go to the theatre to-night.”

“The theatre?”

“Yes—for the ‘Trumpet.’ ‘To such base uses may we come at last!’ I, who have criticised Sophocles, am now to criticise Jones!”

“What is the play?”

“Hell knows. Something musical—that's all I know. But I've got the bill somewhere.”

“Musical—and they send you?”

“That's the very reason, I suppose. If it had been a new edition of Sophocles they'd have sent it to you. But after all, what does it matter? A tune's a tune, and a song's a song, I suppose.”

“Not quite, I should say.”

“Well, I confess I never saw any difference between one tune and another. But it can only be asses that read musical criticisms; and it's easy enough to tickle their long ears somehow, so that they mayn't find out one's ignorance. That's my whole theory of the matter.”

“And a very detestable one too.”

“Not at all. Cast not your pearls before swine, as somebody or other says somewhere. But it's time I was off. Where's the coat?—oh, blast it!”

No wonder that he began to swear, for the coat, which had once been the undivided property of Felix, required the most tender and delicate handling to adapt itself to the big frame of Barton; and now, with a sudden cry, as it were, it split from tail to collar, and became an undivided coat, in any sense, no more.

Barton first looked ruefully at the result of his attempt, and then burst into a loud laugh. The misfortune was serious, but was not, at the same time, without its comic element.

“There!” he went on; “what in the devil's name is to be done now? One can't get mine out of pawn to-night, that's certain—nor to-morrow, unless I write this review. I know—give me one of those pens, and a scrap of your paper. The music-paper will do—it'll look all the better. I'll give you another lesson in the art of criticism.”

He placed the play-bill before him and began to write with his usual rapidity.

"There," he said at the end of about half an hour, during which Felix had been wearily proceeding with his copying—"there, I think that'll do for the swine. Just see that I haven't made any technical blunders, or called any thing by a wrong name."

So Felix read, "'— *Theatre*. Last night this house re-opened under the able and enterprising management of Mr. Green—"

"A manager is always able and enterprising," interrupted Barton, "just as a critic is always able and impartial. That's only common form business. Go on."

"For performances in which the highest class of music is to hold a distinguished place."

"That's a quotation from the bill. Go on."

"With this view we are glad to find that he has engaged the services of that eminent Parisian composer, Monsieur Louis Prosper—*Grand Dieu! Prosper! Est-il possible?*" And Felix leaped suddenly from his seat.

"Why, what's wrong?" asked Barton. "It's all out of the bill, so far."

"Wrong? On the contrary, it is all right! Here—give me the coat—fasten it together anyhow—I go to the theatre instead of you."

"What—and write the review?"

"Bah! Never mind the review; that'll keep now. You may be an 'able and impartial critic;' but you touch not that which regards Louis Prosper."

"What—is he a friend of yours? Is he good for half a crown?"

"For something better, I hope, than your half a crown!"

And so, from his bare and miserable garret, without a shirt to his back, which was covered only by the rags of what had once been a coat, but which now consisted of little more than rents and pins, the Marquis de Croisville went forth to apply for aid to the Jew-fiddler, who was at that moment ruling his orchestra with a jewelled hand.

CHAPTER VI.

NEITHER, therefore, of the lovers of Made-moiselle Angélique Lefort was just now in a flourishing condition, inasmuch as one was within an ace of starvation, and the other had a bullet in his body, at about as inconvenient a season as can well be imagined.

Mr. Prescott, Lieutenant Mountain, Captain Seward, and the surgeon himself, who had acquired considerable experience of gunshot wounds, not only in the Peninsula and the Low Countries, but in such more accessible and scarcely less instructive places as Chalk Farm and Wormwood Scrubbs, were unanimous in thinking that Hugh Lester would never open his eyes again.

Those were not the days when mere bare human life, even if bought at the price of honor, was considered among those who did regard honor as being of any very great value in itself; and had such an opinion yet acquired its full force, none of these four, who had seen death in many forms, would have necessarily been much, if at all, affected by the sight of one dead body the more. Not one of them would have refused to risk his own life in a similar encounter a hundred times if necessary. Prescott had killed his man

at least once before; and the other three had seen death wholesale, in the hospital and in the field. Not one was in the least likely to be troubled with morbid misgivings about the termination of any meeting between gentlemen, however lamentable it might be. But, nevertheless, not one felt very much at ease with himself just now. It was not good to see this young man, who but a minute ago had been full of health and high spirit, with a long and prosperous and, to all appearance, happy life before him, suddenly sent out of the world for having been guilty of an excess of chivalry. Remorse is of course too strong a word; but certainly Mr. Prescott did feel that his satisfaction had been unsatisfactory. He would not indeed have retired from the contest even in order to recall his opponent to life, for to give up a contest was not in his nature; but he would willingly have paid a great many thousand pounds, and, as men go, it is something to be willing to do even so much; and if one has the great many thousand pounds to give, the will to give them is a great deal more than something.

In fact, he did what he could by accompanying the unconscious form of his late opponent to the public-house which was not far off, and where it was laid upon a bed until it should be removed to Earl's Dene. Then he went away with Lieutenant Mountain; for, though he had no serious consequences to apprehend for himself, it was still necessary that he should at least leave the immediate neighborhood for the present.

It was of course upon Captain Seward that devolved the most difficult duty of all—that of telling Miss Clare that she was now childless indeed. He would rather have been the principal in any number of duels; but it had to be done; and besides, he had in his keeping those last five letters of his own principal, of which one was for her. So he drove himself, not too quickly, back to Earl's Dene, and asked to see Miss Clare privately.

In all the world there is no more formidable task than to have to tell a woman of the unexpected death of one whom she loves. At all events, Captain Seward thought so now; for he had never seen Miss Clare before, and did not know how she took things—that is to say, whether she would faint or scream, or merely burst into tears.

"Miss Clare," he said, with as much sympathy as he could manage, "I am Captain Seward of the —at Redchester, you know. Could you prepare yourself for news—you know—most painful—in fact—if you could—it would be better."

She bowed, as a sign that she was ready to hear it, whatever it might prove to be.

The gallant Captain began to stammer again. At last,

"Damn it, madam," he burst out; "my friend, Hugh Lester—there has been a meeting—and—"

Miss Clare neither fainted nor screamed nor burst into tears.

"You mean a duel?" she only asked, though in a fever of fear.

"It couldn't be helped, indeed, I assure you. I did my best—as his friend, you know—but—"

Miss Clare suddenly stepped forward, and grasped the mantel-piece, partly to support herself—partly because her hands needed to clutch something.

"And he is dead?" she said.

Seward remained silent, and only hung down his head. Thus he did not see that violent grasp of the hand, nor the trembling of the lines of the mouth, which belied the hard coldness of the words which he heard.

"I need not ask if he was in the right, or how he behaved," she continued in the same strange tone, after a pause.

"Admirably."

"Then—"

She said no more, but only showed by a slight gesture that she wished to be alone.

"What a monster of a woman!" thought Captain Seward to himself as, having silently laid the letter upon the table before her, he left the room and the house. But he was wrong, as he would have owned could he have read her heart. It is the calm and stern woman who is to be pitied when a sudden blow falls upon her far more than her who is able to find relief in hysterics. Unfortunately, however, this is not the order in which compassion is bestowed; and men forget that the fullest heart is always the last to overflow.

"Am I never to expiate my sin?" she thought bitterly. "Am I ever to prove a curse to those whom I love most?—and Hugh—"

Then she did break down; and Captain Seward would have called her monster no more. But she was one who would have died rather than shed a tear in the sight of a stranger. Reserve with her was both a habit and an instinct, even in grief; which is often the case with those whose pride is genuine, and not mere affectation. It is terribly pathetic, this proud modesty of soul, which is ashamed even in the sight of sympathy.

Of course the ill news had reached Earl's Dene of itself as soon as, if not before, it had been brought officially by Captain Seward. The external coldness of Madam Clare was certainly not imitated either by her guest or by her household. On the contrary, the one, without giving herself time to think or to realize, rushed to the side of her hostess, and the others into the wildest confusion. The kitchen amply made up, in the matter of hysterics, for what was wanting in the drawing-room. But Miss Raymond's impulse to console her friend was balked. Madam Clare was invisible even to her. She was reading the letter that Hugh had addressed to her before he fell.

It was a dreadful revelation to her, from which not even her infinite sorrow could take away the bitterness of disappointment; and when she learned, as the reader will have guessed, that her nephew was still living, her infinite joy was unable to make her forget what she had felt in her sorrow.

And so it was for this that she had toiled and taken much thought, and done her duty in her station, and made friends and foes, and fought hard, and spent the wealth of her affection, which was none the less plentiful, because the treasure-house was old—for this, that the glory of Earl's Dene should pass into the hands of a girl little above the rank of a servant, who intended to go upon the stage, and who was a Frenchwoman and a Papist to boot! She was quite as prejudiced now as she had been in her rather wild youth: it was only the direction of her prejudices that was changed. And then,

too, she was unconsciously put out by finding that the penetration of which she was so proud had been at fault all along; that she had been suspecting Marie, while the true enemy had been Angélique. But worst of all was the feeling that Hugh himself had deceived her in the matter.

It was not that, like some mothers, she foolishly and vainly grieved at finding out that she held only the second place in her son's affection. She was much too wise and sensible for that. On the contrary, she wished to see him married before she died, and she wished him to choose one whom he could love. But then she was much too fond of managing every thing and every body, not to wish to manage that most important matter with her own hands. If Hugh had only seen fit to fall in love with the heiress of New Court, she would have been more than satisfied; and this for several reasons, one of which was altogether new.

An election in those days was not a cheap amusement. No one except Mr. White and Madam Clare had the least idea of what had to be spent upon the contest for Denethorp. Of course it had been the policy of the Yellows to make it a battle of purses, seeing that that of their champion was on the whole the best supplied; and Miss Clare's, though long, was not inexhaustible. Her unencumbered estate had for the first time to learn what is meant by a mortgage; and the thought vexed Miss Clare's soul, who had set her heart upon leaving it to her heir in as free a condition as she had herself received it. Now New Court "marched" with Earl's Dene. Even had the owner of the former not personally been an eligible match, the two properties seemed made to be married; and how could the pecuniary wounds received during the contest be more satisfactorily cured?

So much for the state of Miss Clare's mind during the weary time that passed while Hugh lay in the delirium of the fever caused by his wound, and utterly incapable of taking the least interest in what was going on among either his friends or his foes. Of course Miss Raymond quitted Earl's Dene as soon as possible, and carried off her companion with her, who left Denethorp willingly. Nothing more could be done there now; and, should Hugh finally recover, the letter that had been delivered to her by Captain Seward would prove by no means a bad card in the game that she was playing with Fortune and Miss Clare.

Meanwhile, in spite of Hugh's condition, his friends by no means slackened their exertions in his behalf. On the contrary, they worked all the harder for their wounded chief, out of whose bullet they coined plenty of telling points. Of course Warden now came to the front more than ever, if possible; and at last, when the day came, to the surprise of none but to the frantic disappointment of many, the poll closed with an undoubted majority in favor of Mr. Lester. Thanks mainly to the doctor's son, Earl's Dene had held its own.

But still it was a tame and unexciting end to that long and exciting canvass. Neither candidate was present to make his final speech; to chair the conqueror in his present state was of course out of the question: and the beauty, fashion, and royalty of Earl's Dene put in no appearance. Mark Warden, from the balcony of the King's

Head, had to receive, on the part of his friend, both the cheers of the Blues and the rotten eggs of the Yellows.

Now, it will doubtless be remembered that the partisans of the latter color formed the strongest mob, and that they included the mill-hands almost to a man. Under a system of universal suffrage Prescott would have been returned triumphantly. It may, therefore, be readily imagined that, although Mark Warden represented the victor, the rotten eggs were far more plentiful than the cheers, seeing that the losing was the popular side. Had Hugh Lester been able to show himself, and had Alice Raymond been there to fill the market-place with the glory of her smile and of her blue ribbons, and had Madam Clare had the good sense not to accompany her, the Yellows would, in all probability, have taken their beating pretty well; for they liked Hugh personally, and the smile of a pretty girl has its influence even with a mob. But as things stood, smarting as they were under the sting of defeat, deprived of any ordinary way of letting off their rage, and with no spectacle of triumph to amuse them, the beer with which they were filled to repletion turned sour, and things began to look ill for the peace of the town.

But an English mob is slow to ferment. So long as Mark Warden was endeavoring from the balcony to thank the electors of Denethorp in the name of his friend Mr. Lester for having stood so well by Church and State, and to congratulate the town generally upon its new representative, his hearers contented themselves with drowning his voice in a torrent of groans for himself, for Lester, and, above all, for Madam Clare, and of cheers for Prescott, and by assiduously pelting him with eggs, potatoes, and the other missiles in use on such occasions, till he was obliged to make a final bow and retire. But when this little piece of vengeance was over, and there was nothing external to itself to engage its attention, the crowd was thrown upon its own resources.

It is rather a strong remark to make about any thing, seeing how many hideous things there are in the world; but still, on the whole, it may fairly be said that the most hideous of all is an angry mob. It is literally a thing, or rather a monster; for it ceases to be made up of men with distinct personalities of their own. Even in the dulllest and quietest of places an angry mob at once takes the guise of its fellows in the great cities of the world. All are alike—alike in stupidity, in madness, and in brutality; and while an English mob is certainly not worse than those of other countries, it is certainly not better—except in the matter of garlic. Now the Mayor of Denethorp happened to be a man of sense, and, not liking the look of things—for he had heard that the malcontents of Denethorp had been reinforced by some roughs from Redchester and by some more dangerous roughs from B—— itself, who had scented carrion from afar, with the strange instinct of their kind—he sent an express to the Redchester barracks to ask for the loan of a troop of dragoons for the night, and then went home to entertain some of the leading conservatives at a dinner of triumph and congratulation. Mark Warden did not remain to enjoy his hospitality, however, but hurried off at once to Earl's Dene. By degrees all the respectable inhabitants of the place had left the

streets; and the worse portion of the crowd was left to itself.

After a few drunken fights had taken place, a few black eyes been given, and a few of those who dared to wear the colors of victory knocked down and well kicked and trampled upon, the signal for mischief was given by a very small boy, who, for mere fun, threw a stone through one of the windows in the front of the King's Head. In another minute the inn had not a window left unbroken. After this glorious achievement the mob, with a cheer of triumph, marched into the High Street, and performed the same operation upon the shops and houses at first of those who were known to be Tories, and afterwards indiscriminately. At the end of the High Street it turned to the left, and soon afterwards, finding itself in front of Mr. Warden's house, repeated the performance upon its windows also, including that which Lorry had at least remembered to have mended only the very day before. The brass plate was of course torn off, and far greater damage would in all probability have been done, had not some one in the crowd suddenly cried out,

"To Market Street! Let's knock up Lester's French drab!"

It was a suggestion exactly calculated to charm a mob already heated with easy triumphs. To attack a young girl and a weak old man is exactly the sport in which such a Hydra revels, when its blood is well up. With an evil shout and a final discharge at the house of the surgeon, who was dining with the mayor, while poor Lorry was trembling in the coal-hole, the crowd turned, and almost ran to Market Street.

"Twenty-three!" called out a dozen of its voices, and it stopped.

But the hospitality of the mayor had by this time been broken into by the news of what was going on in the town. He was by no means a man of commanding presence, nor did he possess too much courage; but no one could say of him afterwards, as has sometimes been said of mayors on similar occasions, that he did not, at all events, try to do his duty like a man. He had already sent a second express to Redchester, to hurry the dragoons; and now, attended by many of his guests, he gained the window of a house opposite to No. 23 by entering through the back door, and attempted to make himself heard.

But it was not likely that he should succeed in doing what Mark Warden had failed to do. His second word was drowned by a yell, and by a crash of stones upon the house of the bootmaker who was so unfortunate as to have the Leforts for lodgers. The situation was so dangerous that the mayor retired from his exposed position, and small blame to him.

But Monsieur Lefort came forward to his own window. Mrs. Price had been far more formidable to this French gentleman than all the *canaille* of the town could possibly be. He turned very pale, indeed; but it was because of the insulting shouts that reached Marie's ears as well as his own. Having sent his daughter, who, brave as she was, was certainly not too brave to tremble, with the two children into a back room, he went straight to the window and displayed to the crowd below the barrel of some ancient weapon of the blunderbuss order.

As an answer to this piece of bravado went up a roar half of anger, half of laughter; and then a

stone went up also, sufficiently well aimed to hit the old Frenchman on the shoulder.

The sting of the stone roused up the spirit of combat in him who felt it. Hitherto he had been a gentleman defying *canaïlle*, and a father defending his children; but now he was a Frenchman who had received a blow. He retired at once from the window, but it was only to fill his weapon with powder and ball.

"Let's rout out the lot of 'em!" cried some one.

The mob answered with a confused burlesque of the shouts of the hunting-field, and a charge was made at the street-door of the house, which, barred and bolted as it was, could not resist the rush for long. In a minute or two it gave way, and the two or three men who were immediately pressing against it were sent flying into the entrance-passage, and, in a second, trampled under the feet of their followers. The shop was soon in the wildest disorder, and a few of the invaders, eager for mischief, were beginning to mount the stairs. Marie was on her knees, praying to saints and angels with all her strength; the bootmaker and his wife had followed the example of Lorry.

Suddenly the sound of a shot was heard, and then a cry from the street.

Marie sprang from her knees in wild alarm, and the mob was hushed for an instant into silence. But only for an instant; for in another there went up to the skies such a roar as Dene-thorp had never heard. Stones flew like hail and at random, many recoiling upon the heads of those who threw them. Meanwhile not a few of the rioters, discontented with this barren mode of attack, rushed into the house itself, and were, little by little, and step by step, forcing those who had already entered it up the stairs. It seemed only a question of time whether the second story itself should be reached; whether Marie's own room should be invaded by this horrible tide.

It was a terrible moment. But, thank heaven, "when bale is hext, boot is next"—so it is always. The longing ears of the Mayor were at last gladdened by the sound of the galloping of hoofs upon the hard pavement, and by the ring of steel. In another instant the end of the street that opened upon the market-place was filled with a welcome vision of shining helmets and scarlet coats and drawn swords.

"Halt!"

The sharp word of command rang through the street, and the coward heart of the Hydra shrank and shrivelled. Captain Seward, who was in command of the troop, leaving his men where they were, rode forward alone through the crowd as coolly and carelessly as if it had consisted of so much brushwood, towards the house where the Mayor was beckoning to him from the window, and not a man opposed his passage. It is nonsense to say that an English mob has any peculiar respect for the law. But it has a peculiar fear of the law when reminded of its strength by the sight of a sword or a truncheon; and this goes far to supply the want of respect. Before the officer had reached the door the street was empty.

All was well, then, after all, except for the breaking of glass—and, as his son-in-law was a glazier—well, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good!

So thought the Mayor as he shook hands with Captain Seward. But so did not think Marie.

Poor Monsieur Lefort, too proud to leave the window, had been struck on the temple during that last wild storm of stones; and when she emerged from her own room she found him dead.

CHAPTER VII.

Hugh's wound had left him in a very feeble state of convalescence, so that he was now just in that condition which a woman, however much of manliness she may have in her character, is likely to fix upon as giving her a good opportunity for bringing a man to task, and in which a man is no match for the weakest of women. For it is impossible to rebel against an affectionate nurse, even were it not a trouble; and when a Madam Clare is the nurse, and a Hugh Lester the patient, the impossibility is more impossible still.

"Hugh," she said to him two or three days after he had left his bed, "you must have been expecting me to talk to you."

He summoned up all the energy that Mr. Prescott and two doctors had left him among them, for he knew what was coming.

"I hope," she went on, "that your illness has given you an opportunity of considering?"

He waited for her to continue.

"At least, if you have not considered, I hope you will now."

"I have considered it," he said.

"I am glad of that. And now we shall understand each other once more."

"Aunt," he answered, "I am afraid you do not understand."

"But you had considered the matter, did you not say?"

"I have," he said gravely—he had become very much graver of late, independently of his illness—"and—I am not changed."

"What? Is it—can it be still possible—"

"Am I not engaged to her?"

"Engaged! You must be infatuated."

"But what objection—"

"What objection? I wonder you can ask such a question."

"She is a lady."

"No, Hugh—she is not a lady; and, if she were, that has nothing to do with it. I can not argue such an absurd question."

"My dear aunt—"

"No. I do not call her a lady who has acted as she has done."

"And how has she acted? What has she done?"

"Hugh, your folly goes beyond all bound."

"I will not argue with you, aunt. You do not know her."

"Nor do you, it seems."

"But even if I did not trust her, as I do, and even if I did not—love her, she has my word. And now, too, that she has no friend but me—now that she has lost her only protector, and lost him on my account—"

"Is the successful candidate bound to marry every girl who loses her protector in an election riot? Surely you are talking the wildest folly. You can not love her—it is impossible. It is a boy's fancy of which you ought to be ashamed."

"It is no boy's fancy, aunt. And it is a ques—"

tion of honor, too. I could not give her up, even if I would."

"Oh, Hugh—remember that we are mother and son. If you did but know—"

She took his hand in hers, with a greater show of affection than he had ever witnessed in her. Tenderness is a better weapon of attack than pride; and he was moved.

"My dear aunt—my dearest mother—I do know—I do remember. But I know also that I am doing what is right, and that you will acknowledge that I am doing what is right in the end. You can not ask me to give up, to break my word to her I love when she is most helpless. In this I can not obey you, nor could you wish me to. In every thing else—"

"Yes," she said, excitedly, "in every thing but in what concerns the most important step in your whole life—in every thing but just where I require your obedience most! That is not trust—that is not obedience. Hugh, if you persist in this folly of yours, we can not be as we have always been; and I shall care about nothing any more. If you have a right to choose who shall be your wife, I have a right to choose who shall be my daughter. Decide between her and me. I will speak no more about it now; and I pray that you may see things in a better light."

And so the conversation ended for the present, leaving Miss Clare angry, and her nephew exhausted. Neither recurred to the subject for some days; on the contrary, both studiously avoided it. But the truce was hollow, and both alike felt that the great struggle was to come. Miss Clare was perfectly sincere in saying that she would be infinitely distressed by a breach between herself and her nephew: she would have been right had she said that it would have rendered her heart-broken. It would be far better for her that he had died than that they should become estranged. But to give way was a thing of which she was incapable. She had never given way to any body in her life; and it was much too late to begin now, whatever distress her obstinacy might cause herself or any one else. Besides, she thought with equal sincerity that it was her bounden duty not to let Hugh and Earl's Dene go to the destruction that she was sure must needs spring from so gross a *mésalliance*.

"Hugh," she accordingly said to him a day or two before he was to leave for London, "I suppose you will be seeing Alice Raymond again before very long?"

"Oh, I shall call there at once, of course. Have you any message for her?"

"I will give you a letter for her. What a dear girl she is! I got quite to look upon her as my other child."

Hugh let this pass, and said nothing.

"She will make an admirable wife—and she is so unspoiled and unaffected. So different from most other girls."

Hugh began to hum a tune mildly.

"Do you not think so, Hugh?"

"I think she is a charming girl, indeed, aunt."

"It is not every day that one finds a pretty girl so natural and so amiable—so good. How delightful it would be if you took it into your head to ask her to be my daughter indeed. But perhaps you have taken it into your head already? If so—"

She spoke almost appealingly, and with a forced smile. Hugh felt the weight of her suggestion, in spite of its having been made so wholly without tact; for, as has been said, he felt to the full the influence of all family and social traditions, and it had always been the part of Earl's Dene, like "*Felix Austria*," to increase itself by marriage. But he was now under the influence of something much stronger than family and social tradition.

"But the lady herself might have something to say to that arrangement," he answered, as lightly as he could.

Miss Clare's face brightened a little, with a faint ray of hope.

"Nothing unpleasant," she replied. "I do not fancy that you, at least, would find the lady of New Court very cruel."

He saw that his manner had somehow given her a wrong impression, which it was his duty to correct at once, especially as it was evident that her suggestion had been made seriously and in full earnest.

"Aunt," he said, gravely, "you know that such a thing is quite impossible."

"Indeed I do not know it. Why should it be impossible? You are both nearly of an age, both of nearly equal position—the advantage being yours in both cases—you both have the same tastes, you like each other—why in the world should it be impossible?"

Hugh was silent; but his silence expressed his thought only too well.

"You do not mean, of course," she went on, in a low and constrained voice, "that you are still indulging in any folly about—about her servant?"

"About Miss Lefort, you mean? I do not consider it folly."

Miss Clare was silent in her turn. The inevitable battle was about to begin.

"What you say is impossible," he continued. "I can not ask Miss Raymond to be my wife. I am not free; and I would not be free even if I could."

"And"—this scornfully—"can you possibly imagine that I should open my arms and receive Miss Lefort as a daughter?"

"I had hoped so—I hope still that you will."

"You have lost your senses. I will not see you acting so madly without doing what I can to prevent it. Earl's Dene shall never come to this girl."

Hugh understood this threat—for it was nothing less than a threat to himself—perfectly well. But he was nothing if not chivalrous. He certainly could not give up Angélique now; and even Miss Clare felt that by her last speech she had managed to put herself in the wrong.

"Aunt, I am indeed sorry that you are so prejudiced against Angélique—against Miss Lefort. But when a man's whole happiness is concerned—"

"That is nonsense. A man's whole happiness does not depend upon such things, although a boy may think so."

"Mine does, however."

"I did not think you were such a slave to your fancies."

"This is not a fancy."

"You are determined, then?"

"Quite."

daily pupils whom they hoped to obtain through the recommendations of Angélique's late mistress. But still all this was very vague and uncertain at the best, especially as Marie herself was so utterly ignorant of the world, while Angélique was used to luxury, and would have to devote herself rather to study than to earning money, which must for the present be the duty of the former. Nevertheless, it seemed the least unpromising plan that could be adopted.

Monsieur Prosper was quite willing to receive back his old pupil, and to undertake to do what he could for her. But he was not so pleased for the sake of Felix, who had heard nothing of her now for a long time; and so he took care neither to mention her to him, nor to let them come across each other at his lodgings. But one day Dick Barton, who was reading the "Trumpet," said:

"So I see they've hanged that man at Red-chester for the Denethorp riot. Poor devil! I dare say it was only his fun, after all—and he only mistook his man. If they had only potted my friend Warden now, he might have had his joke, and been knighted on the spot into the bargain, if it was the fashion to treat men according to their deserts."

Felix was no reader of newspapers, but the word "Denethorp" struck his ears. He questioned Barton, and learned from him all that was known to the country at large about the Denethorp riot, the murder of Monsieur Lefort, and the trial of some of the rioters, of whom the Government, being determined to make an example, had caused two to be hanged—in the teeth, it must be owned, of very doubtful evidence. But then political trials in those days were political with a vengeance.

Of course Felix cared nothing for that—he cared only for the matter so far as it regarded Angélique. Now that the return of Monsieur Prosper had enabled him to walk the streets in decent clothes, he, the very next morning, called at the house where Miss Raymond staid when in town, and inquired after Miss Lefort. But the gorgeous footman who opened the door to him, and felt insulted, no doubt, at having had to leave his own occupations for such a purpose, only told him that Angélique was no longer there, and either would not, or could not, give him any further information on the subject. His appearance was any thing but creditable in the eyes of his informant, or rather non-informant, who snubbed him as a gentleman in livery so well knows how to snub a fellow who is out at elbows.

But it was inevitable that he should find her out before long. The next time that he called he asked to see Miss Raymond herself, who easily remembered him as the deputy of Monsieur Prosper at Madame Mercier's. He made his own desire to obtain pupils and engagements in London his ostensible reason for seeing her; but he managed easily to learn all that he wanted to know about Angélique, and her family and her circumstances.

It was a terrible shrug of the shoulders that Monsieur Prosper gave when Miss Raymond made inquiries of him about Felix, and expressed herself willing to become his patroness also. But seeing that Miss Raymond's patronage was worth having, he could not deprive his friend of the chance of obtaining it; and so, much against

his will, he gave Felix the best of characters, both from an artistic and from a moral point of view.

"After all," he thought to himself, "I am not the fellow's guardian; and if he didn't go to the devil in this way, I have no doubt he would in another. But I'll never pick up a wayside genius again."

It need not be said that, for his part, Felix had flown on the wings of love, as the phrase goes, to the house where the two girls were lodging. But neither was at home, so that his patience had to be exercised once more. By the time that he reached his own room, however, he found a note that, to him, was full of exciting matter, although it was only a request from Miss Raymond that he would attend a "*soirée musicale*," as she chose to term it, that was to be given at the house in Portman Square the very next evening. A great prima donna was to sing, and Mademoiselle Lefort was to make a sort of private début.

CHAPTER IX.

"I THOUGHT you were come to have a chat," said Monsieur Prosper, as Felix dropped into his room on his way to Portman Square. "But what is it?" he asked, suddenly. "You look like Solomon in all his glory. Mind, I say, look like it—for you are not Solomon in any other sense, my poor Felix. He was wise, and—well, never mind for the present. But what is it? Can you stay? I have a new duet for piano and violin I want to show you. It's magnificently difficult."

"Oh, I only just looked in for a minute on my way. I have an engagement."

"Really? I thought I always knew every body's engagements."

"It is at your friend Miss Raymond's."

"The devil!"

Felix could not help coloring. "And why not?" he asked.

"Oh, it's all right, of course. They'll pay you—all safe enough."

"Are you not going?"

"I? No. I should have to hear some of my pupils, and I get enough of them in the day without wasting my evenings upon them as well. Besides, I must be at the theatre. Do you know who's to be there?"

"Oh, Catalani's to be the star, I believe; and the rest amateurs, I should fancy."

"Aha! so my new pupil is not to be there, then?"

"By the way," asked Felix, making a vain effort to change the conversation, "what do you think of your new pupil?"

"My dear Felix, when I want my throat cut I will perform the operation myself."

"Naturally. But does any one want to cut your throat, then?"

"Oh yes; half the musical profession. But you certainly would, if I said that my new pupil—by whom I suppose you mean Mademoiselle Lefort—is not Catalani and Mara combined. And so I prefer to hold my tongue."

"You don't speak very warmly about her."

"There—did I not say that you would cut my throat? No—I will leave you to judge for

yourself. I don't suppose you don't know that you will hear her in something less than an hour."

"You know how important it is that she should do well now. Miss Raymond was telling me—I suppose you have heard about her and her cousin—how she also wants to do something—"

"A cousin too, is there? Is there no end to these women?"

"Have you not heard the story?"

"I hear so many stories—I dare say I have; but I never listen to any thing but *do, re, mi*. What is it?"

"Of the death of Angélique's—Mademoiselle Lefort's uncle—"

"Oh, I remember—at an election. Yes—this is certainly a free country. My faith! I should think so. I wonder I got alive through the streets myself. But the cousin?"

"It is a sad story indeed. He left a daughter, and two young children besides, who are dependent on her."

"*Eh bien!* The story is not very original."

"And how are they to live?"

"*Sacré cochen!* Am I a prophet or a millionaire, that you ask me?"

"Miss Raymond, I can guess from what she said, must have been very good to them; and there is a Monsieur Lester—I think that is the name—"

"Ah, a Monsieur! Is she pretty, this cousin? And yet you ask me how she is to live?"

"I wish you would not joke about it, Prosper."

"Well, I will not, then."

"But Miss Raymond can not support them always. And Angélique is not brought out yet—"

"Ah! *hinc illa lacrymæ*, as Monsieur Dick Barton would say. A strange dog, that Dick Barton! And so they are in London. *Ma foi!* It is the worst place to find any thing to do."

"But you know every body—you might know some one—"

"Oh, I know plenty of people—plenty; and they all want something to do themselves. I want something to do. But this cousin—is she in the profession, then?"

"I believe not. But Miss Raymond said that she might teach children—and you might know—"

"Oh yes, I know. She is the sort of person, you mean, who will just give me the trouble of unteaching every thing when I come after; I know the sort of people who 'might teach children,' as you say. Well, well; no matter for one more or less. They are all the same, these girls, who think they can teach off-hand without having learned."

"But you might keep her in mind?"

"I might, if I knew her name—or I might not, which is more likely."

"Marie Lefort. And," insinuatingly, "when shall I see the duet?"

"Can't you now? I want to have it played at Lady Weston's on Thursday. Would you play in it if I can get Herr Schwärmer to take the piano? Just look at it."

"Oh, I'll try my best with pleasure; and you will not quite forget to do any thing if it comes in your way? But I'm afraid I must be off now."

"Well, if you must—give my love to Mademoiselle Angélique. *Pauvre garçon!*" he added to himself, as Felix closed the door behind him; "just like him—out of work himself, and then thinking only how he can get work for somebody else. And his hanging after that girl, of all girls! It's plain enough to see what *she* is. I wish people wouldn't call and put me out. Couldn't any thing new be done, I wonder? People are getting tired of all the old things. If I could only get hold of a new star! I shan't make my fortune with this Mademoiselle Angélique, I'm afraid. She's pretty—very pretty—no doubt, much too pretty to stick to the boards. She'll be a flash in the pan, even if she isn't a *fiasco*. I wonder why in the devil's name I ever took her up! If the skies would but drop me a new star!"

And so he sank into a fit of calculation—not of castle-building, but of real calculation, with pencil and paper, till it was time for him to go to the theatre. Meanwhile Felix carried his violin-case, which had somehow been replenished since the fire—no doubt Monsieur Prosper could have told how—to the house in Portman Square, of which the windows were now brilliantly lighted. It was not the true season, but the new Parliament was sitting, and the town was sufficiently full.

Miss Raymond, owing perhaps to the fact of her having spent so many years of the most impressive part of her life abroad, was something of the conventional musical fanatic; that is to say, she knew a little music, believed herself to be a critic, and liked to play the part of an art-patroness in a small way; and as her will was law to the relations who so greatly benefited by her living with them, she was able to indulge this as much as she pleased, as well as her more real and natural tastes.

This was intended to be, to some extent, a concert of distinction; and Miss Raymond was good-naturedly vain of an entertainment at which she was going to play the part of art-patroness indeed by introducing to the world, as her own special *protégée* and discovery, one about whom the whole town was at once to run wild. She was not the hostess nominally, but still she was, as it were, the presiding genius of the evening; and she had no reason to complain of having gathered together an audience that was indisposed to be indulgent to her whim. The heiress of New Court was somebody, even in London. Among the rest, Warden, who was now keeping his first term at the Middle Temple, was present, and so, of course, was Angélique, dressed in deep mourning, which, though it did not suit her style, had the effect of making her look interesting. Marie could not come to hear her cousin's first triumph; it was too soon after her sorrow.

The concert itself was very much like other concerts where the performers are for the most part members of an undistinguished clique, and the audience is half ignorant and altogether friendly—that is to say, it was artistically indifferent, but socially pleasant; and Angélique was, as a matter of course, treated as though she had been a real seraph. It would have been just the same had her voice been that of a frog instead of a woman, and had she been incapable of singing a single note in tune. Miss Raymond

was in ecstasies; the nominal *prima donna* condescended to be, or to affect to be, a little out of temper; and every body was satisfied, and nobody could have told why.

Except Felix. He had gone to the party, in his ignorance, as so many, under far less adverse circumstances, have gone before him, expecting all manner of gratification from meeting once more her to whom he had a right to look for what he expected; he had drawn a prophetic picture, in which her eyes sparkled when she saw him, in which he was constantly by her side talking of old times and of things outside and above the crowd, and in which her triumph was altogether lost in his own. But, like the hieroglyphics of prophetic almanacs, his picture prognosticated any thing but what came to pass. How could she, the heroine of the evening, afford to throw more than just one look of recognition to a poor fiddler whose allotted position was behind a cruel red cord, beyond which he dared not trespass? It was in times, be it remembered, when in some far greater, and therefore, it might be presumed, more generous houses than this, the queens of song themselves were separated visibly from the guests, as though their presence was something dangerous. He found that he had to content himself with a distant prospect of her, like that of the sun from the earth; and the prospect was by no means delightful. He had to see others whisper in her ear, to see others sit by her side, to see others lead her to the place where she stood to sing—and, worst of all, to see others make her smile; for she by no means seemed to receive the attentions that were paid her as though her thoughts were as far away from her as he was. He was absurd enough to wonder that absence should have wrought so great a change in her; and, with the irritation of his profession and the passion for equality of his country, felt the unlucky rope in front of him grow and extend into a symbol of all manner of social wrongs besides his own—as though its absence would have made the slightest difference! People have often followed the red flag itself on grounds more absurd than those afforded by a red cord.

"I am an artist," he thought to himself a hundred times over, "and above all these people. Catalani herself is nothing more, after all. It is only in *bourgeois* England, then, that we should be treated so—that we should be treated like infected sheep. I will go at once." But he did not go, of course; for jealousy has its own fascination, and revels in its own wretchedness.

But still jealousy without a special object is to be borne, and he had yet to feel its true sting.

For now it was that a young gentleman who had arrived late, having paid his respects to the ostensible hostess, made his way to where Miss Raymond was sitting and listening to Angélique, who was singing.

The lady of New Court smiled brightly and gave him her hand, but laid her finger on her lips. He sat down beside her in silence, and, during a pause in the song, Felix could have sworn that he saw a glance of recognition pass between the singer and the new-comer, who was far too good-looking to please him. When it was over,

"Now you may speak to me," said Miss Ray-

mond. "What do you think of her? Is she not charming?"

The other, recalled to earth, woke up suddenly to perform his share of the applause that followed. But he did not criticise.

"You are well again, then, as I see you here," asked Miss Raymond. "I wish I could say you looked so, though. I am so glad to see you again."

"Not so glad as I am to be seen, I can assure you. I got sick of being ill; or else the doctors would have had me down at Earl's Dene this very moment."

"Are you wise, then—"

"To be here? Of course I am. When one is strong enough to rebel against two doctors, it is high time to use one's strength. So I travelled up yesterday, and heard from Warden that you were at home this evening." He did not, however, say what else he had heard from Warden—what, in fact, had really brought him there. It would not have been polite to Miss Raymond. "But you do not scold me for coming to you uninvited?"

"As if I were not only too glad you were able! Of course we should have asked you if we had known. So now you are an M.P.! But how you frightened us all!"

"Yes, I am actually an M.P., thanks to Warden, who ought to be in my place, by rights. Ah! he is here, I see," he said, nodding across the room. "But I must compliment the new *prima donna*."

And he went at once to the side of Angélique, who received him with a pressure of the hand just not too long to be noticed by any one, and a look from her eyes that seemed to those of Felix to be a great deal too long.

Nor was this the worst, by any means. Angélique had far too much tact to let it be noticed by the room generally, but her old lover could plainly see that this unknown acquaintance of hers was in reality filling the place to which he had looked forward in vain. He could see that confidential glances and communications were passing between them; and whereas he had been angry with her hitherto for the smiles that she had been scattering around her, he was angry with her now for not scattering them any longer.

It was not long before he was fairly worked into that state of fever in which impulsive men lose all mastery over themselves, and invariably do the most stupid things possible. He made up his mind that as soon as the concert was over, he must and would speak to her—he, who was about as likely to prove her master as he was to fly over the moon, or, for that matter, rather less.

Angélique was sleeping in the house for a night or two, so that the stairs and the hall were not likely to afford him any opportunities. So he lingered long over putting up his instrument, waited till the giving of "good-nights" was in full progress, and then entered the company part of the drawing-room, full of indignation and dignity. He watched the manner in which she parted with Lester, waited till the latter had left the room with Warden, and then presented himself.

"Angélique," he said, "I am come to wish you good-night."

Miss Raymond, with the mistress of the house, was standing close by.

"Ah," said Angélique, suddenly, and with an air of surprise, "Miss Raymond, here is Monsieur Felix—you remember—who gave us some lessons *chez Madame Mercier*."

Miss Raymond held out her hand. "Ah, Monsieur—I have to thank you for your assistance; I hope it will not be the last time. Why did you not come and speak to me before?"

But Felix, being angry, had not forgotten the red cord.

"I did not presume, Mademoiselle," he said, pointedly.

"Do I look so very dreadful, then? And what do you think of our new star—your own pupil, you know?"

"She has received more valuable applause to-night than mine could be, Mademoiselle." Then he added, turning to Angélique, "Could I speak to you a moment, before I go?"

"About my cousins? Oh, certainly," she answered, coldly, and then led the way to a more retired part of the now nearly empty room.

"Well?" she asked.

"And so we meet again at last, Angélique! I thought you were going away forever." He wished to speak tenderly, but did not quite succeed, for the attempt was too self-conscious.

"Yes—as you say, we meet again."

"And when can I see you? For I have certainly not seen you to-night."

"Have you not? I was very visible."

"Yes—in the sense that every one has seen you."

"You speak as if you had something to complain of. What more of me could you have seen?"

"To complain of! I should think so. To have been obliged to sit in a corner, and to see you surrounded by all the blockheads in the room—"

Now it may be barely possible to prove, after a fashion, that Mark Warden, in so far as he, unconsciously putting in practice the theories of Monsieur Prosper, did not allow his career in life to be spoiled by a woman, had some justification for his conduct in its practical wisdom. But it is manifestly impossible to justify this last speech of Felix. At all events, Marie had seen nothing wrong in the one, while Angélique could not—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, would not—pardon the other; and she must be taken to be the best judge. She drew herself up, and said:

"I am sorry you have so poor an opinion of Miss Raymond's friends, Monsieur Felix."

"Monsieur Felix—"

"I beg your pardon—Monsieur Créville. Thanks for correcting me. And what could you expect?—that I should come and sit by you the whole evening?"

"No; but I did expect—that you would at least have known of my being in the room."

"Oh, I knew it well enough; but I do not choose that you should make me appear conspicuous."

"Angélique, you must have changed indeed."

"I do not know in what way; but if I have, I never heard that a woman might not change if she pleases."

"*Bien fol qui s'y fie!*" Do you mean this for a quarrel, Angélique?"

"Why will you be so unreasonable? No—

not unless you force it upon me. And pray do not speak quite so loud."

"*Mon Dieu!* I force a quarrel upon you!"

"So it seems. And now I think you had better say good-night. The room is empty. Good-night, Monsieur Créville," she added in a louder tone, so that Miss Raymond might hear.

He was not in a condition to speak; so he bowed to Miss Raymond and left the room.

Angélique did not look after him, but watched the exit of her lover in the pier-glass, to which she had turned to see that her expression was sufficiently composed. "What folly!" she said to herself: "would he have me wait ten years for the pleasure of living in a garret at the end? What selfish creatures men are! If he would only but be reasonable!" Then she heaved the smallest of sighs, and went to bed as soon as Miss Raymond would allow her, where her triumph of the evening did not prevent her very soon falling asleep. She had done a very good evening's work in every way, and had fairly earned her repose.

For her, too, is any apology needed? Surely not. Where is the father or mother who would prefer that his or her daughter should keep troth with a penniless fiddler, when she was wooed by Mr. Lester of Earl's Dene? Nor—unless we are very much mistaken—are there many sons or daughters who would, in this respect, practically differ from their fathers and mothers. It is by majorities that the world, it seems, is henceforth to be governed; and in the hands of the majority her case may be left very safely indeed.

CHAPTER X.

MARIE, who was by no means too much troubled with visitors, was very much surprised one morning by being told that a rather oldish foreign gentleman wanted to speak to her. She was not in the most convenient order to receive any one, for she was giving the children their dinner in the one little room that served them for parlor, drawing-room, dining-room, study, and nursery, and that had, therefore, the air of being all at once; not to speak of its looking a little like a dressmaker's work-room besides. But the aspect of the stranger reassured her. He did not look like one who took notice of such things.

"Mademoiselle Marie Lefort?" he asked, rather bluntly.

She bowed nervously, for she was not used to speaking to strangers. The children neglected their plates, and sat staring.

"You know my name, perhaps, Mademoiselle? Monsieur Prosper."

Her face brightened. "With whom my cousin Angélique is studying?"

"The same." He looked at her sharply in a way that she did not like, and that made her color. "And I hear," continued her visitor, smiling at her confusion, "that you want to do something."

"I do indeed."

"Ah! and these little ones are the brother and sister of whom I have heard. And what's your name, my man?"

"Ernest—and this is Fleurette."

"Do you like chocolate, you and Fleurette?"

and he produced a snuff-box half full of *bon-bons*. "Catch—that's right. And what can you do, Mademoiselle? Ah, you paint a little, I see. Not much in my way, that. Do you play at all—sing?"

"Very little indeed, Monsieur."

"Ah, you are not wise, Mademoiselle. You should have said 'Yes, a great deal.' You must learn to play on your own trumpet a little. And if you really play only a very little, I am afraid you will teach only a very little too."

"It is my cousin who sings."

"Who will sing, perhaps," you should have said. Well, well; I dare say you will do no worse than half your profession."

Marie was looking very mortified and small.

"Would you mind letting me hear your voice, Mademoiselle?"

He saw her look of terror and smiled, but sat down at once before the open piano—a parting present from Miss Raymond to Angélique. "Now, mademoiselle;" and he struck a chord.

She had never opened her lips in song before any body before, and having to do so before this distinguished musician fairly frightened her out of her wits. A sound, however, did come out; and, though it trembled, it was in tune.

"Now this, mademoiselle;" and so he proceeded for a minute or two. Then he shook his head, and shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"Now play me something," he said.

She was trembling all over with nervousness; but she dared not disobey.

"Play any thing you know best," he said.

She sat down, and struck a very feeble chord. He stopped her.

"Who has taught you?" he asked.

"I have never had any regular lessons. Sometimes I had a few at a school in the town where I lived—"

"H'm! well?"

"And Angélique plays so splendidly—"

"Never mind Angélique. Well, let me see if you can do any thing at all. Never mind me," he said; "I'm not sure that I shall even listen to you."

He turned away, walked to the window, and began to amuse himself by humming a tune and looking into the street. She began to play, first absurdly and weakly; but she gradually gained confidence to such an extent that she forgot that she was not alone. Indeed music to her mind suggested the idea of solitude. When the piece was over, however, her misery returned a hundredfold. He was standing over her.

"You did not tell me the truth, mademoiselle. Your fingering is ridiculous, and you make the most wonderful blunders besides. It is plain that your country teacher was an ass. But fortunately your other teacher was any thing but an ass."

"Angélique?"

"Bah! what has Angélique to do with it?"

"But I have had no other, I assure you."

"Oh yes, you have; one who takes very few pupils—very few indeed. Tell me—how did you use to spend your days?"

"Oh, I used to get up early, and if it was fine, and I had time, I used to go out and walk or sketch a little. Then I used to make the *breakfast*, and when my poor father went out

to his lessons, I used to teach the children, and mend the clothes, and go out to buy what was wanted from the town. Then we had dinner; and then I did whatever I had not had time to do in the morning, or else I amused myself."

"Ah! and how did you amuse yourself?"

"Generally with the harpsichord. I was always alone in the afternoon, so it did not matter what noise I made. And then when my father came in I sat with him, and finished mending the clothes, till it was time to go to bed."

"My God, what a life!" said the energetic Monseigneur Prosper, who would have gone mad had he to pass an hour without the excitement in which he lived.

"I was very happy, monsieur."

"But did you never feel any discontent? Did you never wish to spread your wings and fly?" This was a wonderfully poetic flight for him, and he emphasized it by imitating the process with his arms.

"Never, Monsieur. I was quite content then. And as for my wings—" she smiled.

"Then you played to yourself almost daily?"

"Whenever I could. It was, indeed, my great pleasure. I do not know why, I am sure, for I play very badly, I know, and I never was taught more than what I told you; but somehow, whenever I found myself alone, and with nothing better to do, I used to sit down and play without thinking about it. Very often I did not know what I was playing, or even whether I was playing at all."

"And what did you play?"

"Oh, any thing that came in my way. Ah, Monsieur, you can not think what I sometimes found in that old harpsichord of ours. I think I used to find in it every thing in the world. I am afraid you must think me very foolish; but when other girls were reading novels, and talking the nonsense that we girls do talk among each other, you know, they never seemed to get so much as I did, in my own way. I used to play the same thing over and over again, and always seemed to get something new and fresh out of it. And sometimes I used to seem to understand every thing, and sometimes to feel every thing without understanding it, and sometimes to lose myself altogether, and sometimes—"

She stopped suddenly, and blushed at the nonsense she felt she was talking. She had never made so long a speech about herself in her life. But Monsieur Prosper, for a wonder, neither smiled, nor shrugged his shoulders, nor uttered a sarcasm. He only took a pinch of snuff, and said,

"Could you play any thing at sight, Mademoiselle?"

She wished the floor to open and swallow her.

"Ernest," said Monsieur Prosper, "just run down stairs and bring up a roll of music and my violin-case."

What new torture was she to undergo?

"This is a duet, Mademoiselle, that I have just been composing for violin and piano. Would you see what you can make of your part?"

The notes seemed to swim before her eyes; but she attacked them mechanically.

"Ah, slower than that, Mademoiselle, one, two, three, four, one . . . oh, *forte*, Mademoiselle, for the sake of heaven! . . . that's it . . .

one, two . . . faster . . . lighter . . . the time there—mark the time, *sacré nom de Dieu!* . . . so . . . oh, horrible! with grace, Mademoiselle, with grace! . . . oh, *miséricorde*, don't you know what *legato* means? . . . Not the pedals there, I implore you—are you mad? . . . *Sacré nom de Dieu!* . . . Now then . . . keep on so . . . oh, faster, faster . . . *prestissimo* . . . mille diables . . . *sacré nom* . . . *tonnerre d'enfer* . . . *cent cochons* . . . *sacr.r.r.r.rè!* . . .”

And so, for a whole half-hour, which seemed to her to be three hundred years at least, her ears were filled, until, what with the music itself, and the shouting and stamping and swearing in which her tyrant indulged when the *impresario* side of his nature was lost in that of the composer, and what with her own nervousness, she almost lost her senses.

But Monsieur Prosper showed her no mercy. No sooner had she struck the last loud chord, than he, having worked himself into that state so well known to and feared by the friends of all poets and composers, in which a man can not restrain his appetite for his own works when he has once tasted them, began to tune his violin.

It need not be said that she had to go through it all again with him, or that this time the scolding she received was something terrific.

“What do you think of that, Mademoiselle?” he said at last, as he returned the violin to its case.

She murmured something.

“Ah, I thought you would like it. That is quite *à la Moretti*; and yet not without originality. But don't flatter yourself that you have played it—that is quite another thing. But I must be off,” he added, looking at his watch, that was suspended to a gold chain as large as a cable, “I have to take it to Herr Schwärmer: I wonder what he will make of it. *Bon jour, Mademoiselle; au revoir, mes enfans:*” and so he hurried off, leaving his victim prostrate with shame and despair.

“Miss Raymond has sent me the wrong cousin, it seems,” Monsieur Prosper said to himself as he left the house.

Poor Marie! Her head ached as though it would split: her brain was in a whirl; and it is no exaggeration to say, though the cause may seem slight enough to those who are not troubled with the nervousness of diffidence, that death would have been a relief to her. She had not strength enough left to close the hateful piano, which stood there an openly accusing witness of her shame. Had she but had the moral courage to refuse to disgrace herself! But it was too late now for regret; she could but cry with vexation.

But worse was yet to come. An hour or two afterwards, when she had become a little more composed, a note was brought to the door, directed in a strange hand to Mademoiselle Marie Lefort.

“5 — Street, Golden Square.

“DEAR MADEMOISELLE,—A despairing fellow-creature implores you to grant him a favor. I am engaged to conduct a concert at Lady Weston's in Park Lane, and I am going to introduce at it for the first time my duet. M. Créville will take the violin; Herr Schwärmer the piano. *Takes*, did I say?—*was* to take! for the

scoundrel has sprained his thumb—would it had been his neck!

“I therefore fly to you, Mademoiselle, in whose eyes I read a compassionate soul. Play it for me; and for eternity oblige

“LOUIS PROSPER.

“The concert is not till the 10th, so you will have plenty of time to study it. M. Créville shall bring it you to-morrow. And, for the love of Heaven, mind about the pedals!

“I will take care you shall be satisfied about terms. *Au revoir, et bon début!*”

What! she asked to play Monsieur Prosper's own work in public at Monsieur Prosper's own request, and in the place of a celebrated professor! Surely there must be some mistake. But no—the note was only too clear, and only too plainly directed to her and to no other. What in the world should she do?

Her first thought was to refuse at once. But then how could she dare offend this terrible Monsieur Prosper? At last, after much unhappy meditation, she made up her mind to wait till the morning. Perhaps by then her persecutor might have thought better of his extraordinary request. Would it might prove so! Meanwhile—for she was weary of this new exercise of thinking about herself—there was nothing to do but sit down and finish darning Fleurette's stockings. When this was finished, she went and looked at the children and then went to bed, where the music of the duet came back to her in the most terrible form of all. Queen Mab was not kind to her that night.

CHAPTER XI.

AND so Marie entered upon a week of wretchedness; for Monsieur Prosper, now that he had once obtained a hold upon her, showed his promised gratitude in a most ungrateful fashion. He not only made her a slave to the duet, but treated her as his pupil without the least reference to what might be her own views and wishes, or even consulting her on the matter. Of course she applied to her husband for advice; but he, to whom Art was only a word which conveyed nothing more than the idea of a womanish amusement with which he had no sympathy, was unable to understand her embarrassment, especially when he learned that she was to be paid for her trouble.

Besides, his own affairs were absorbing his attention more and more. He was bringing the same industry and perseverance to bear upon his new study of the common law of England by which he had already made Greek and mathematics pay so well. The only difference in his style of study was that he found more pleasure in his work now than at Cambridge, and liked it better for its own sake. Blackstone was far more congenial to his practical nature than either Newton or Plato.

And so, on the very evening on which his wife was undergoing the nervous tortures of her *début*, he sat in his chambers in the Middle Temple, of which inn he had become a member, thinking, not about her, but about himself. He was taking stock of his position, for he was prac-

tical even when the Middle Temple port had obliged him to put off his evening spell of work for an hour or two, and thought with a purpose when another would have dreamed; and on comparing what he was now with what he was even so short a time since as when he had been Hugh Lester's companion on the Redchester coach, he was by no means dissatisfied with the result. But still there was one hard fact of which it was impossible to get rid, which went far to spoil all his self-gratulation. He was by no means given to useless regret or to crying after spilt milk, and certainly not given to calling himself a fool; but now, as he balanced his account of profit and loss, he could not help almost thinking himself one.

"It is a hard case that a man should be punished for the mistakes that he commits in his boyhood. I shall now have to go through life with a burden from which I shall never be free, when freedom from every kind of burden is absolutely necessary. Luckily she is not a woman who will interfere with me more than she can help, or perversely stand upon her rights. But that will not prevent my having all the disadvantages of having a wife combined with those of keeping a mistress, without having any of the advantages of either. I believe that if I were free and played my cards decently well, I might try for the New Court Stakes, and not be last in the betting. As it is, I suppose the prize will fall, as usual, to that ass Lester, who seems to have nothing to do but open his mouth, and the good things fall into it of themselves. I don't suppose that he was born richer than I; and clearly not with more brains. And yet, without any trouble or merit on his part, first he becomes heir to one of the finest estates in the country; then, again without trouble or merit of his own, without even caring about it, he drops into a seat in Parliament; and then, without having to look for her, there is an embodiment of all the virtues ready made to his hand. And I, at his age, have had to fight with fortune to wrest from her some three hundred a year. I have borne the whole heat of a contested election for the sake of another, and I am chained for life—well, to another embodiment of all the virtues. Perhaps it would be better if she were not quite so immaculate. Yes, it is certainly a damned hard case! If I were only free, I do not see why the master of New Court should not be as successful against Earl's Dene as for it; and then—Come in!"

This exclamation was caused not by a tap at the door, but by a sound as though the door was being attacked by a battering-ram. He turned round as he spoke, and, to his horror, beheld the form of his old acquaintance, Dick Barton.

"Ah," said the latter, "I guessed it was your name I saw on the staircase—'Mr. M. Warden,' as bright as white paint could make it. And what are you up to now? Laying siege to the Woolsack? Well, if tricks will win the game, you'll do, I should say. One ought to keep sober in your company, it seems, eh?"

The sudden appearance of a big and powerful man upon whom one is conscious of having played a trick, is not altogether the most pleasant thing that can happen. Warden therefore gave a little laugh, and held out his hand.

"Ah, you mean our wager?" he said. "But

I think it was you that got the best of that, wasn't it?"

"I see," the other answered, rather contemptuously, "you consider a contested election to be like charity. Well, perhaps it is—after a fashion. '*Sacro nec cedat honori.*' But it always struck me that our friend Prescott—who, by-the-way, was rather taking me up, and now, of course, has let me drop again like a hot potato—managed to wing the wrong bird. Well, well; let by-gones be by-gones. But how's this? Do you think dry? For my part, I can't suppose that 'think' and 'drink' were made to rhyme for nothing, any more than '*bibere*' and '*scribere.*' Any way, I'm certain that at this moment Dick Barton rhymes with any thing to drink short of pump-water."

"I'm very sorry. My cellar's empty, I'm afraid."

"Oh, if that's all, a shilling or two will set that square. I'll fetch it. There's a place round the corner where there's capital brandy. Perhaps you know it? No? Then you shall in five minutes. I'm afraid I must produce the coin, though."

"I'm very sorry, Barton—but I'm afraid I have an engagement in half an hour."

"Oh, never mind. I'll go when she comes. So just lend me half a crown—or say ten shillings, if you can spare them, and I'll be back in no time."

"Oh, with pleasure," Warden answered, on the principle that the surest way to rid one's self of an acquaintance is to lend him that precise sum. Nor did the loan seem to have been wasted; for five minutes after five minutes passed, and Barton did not return. Warden sat down to read, and it was quite late when a knock at the door made his heart sink within him. It proved, however, not to be Dick Barton this time, but only his friend Hugh Lester.

"Why, Lester, this is a pleasant surprise! What brings you into this part of the world?"

"I am just come from Lady Weston's, old fellow, and thought I would just smoke a cigar with you on my way, as I felt bored."

"Well, I am delighted to see you, especially as I was getting rather bored myself with my own company. Will you take any thing?"

"Have you such a thing as a soda-and-brand?"

"I dare say I have. There—now you can help yourself." Warden could see that his visitor had something on his mind of which he had come to deliver himself; and besides, the Temple is not exactly on the way from Park Lane to Bruton Street. "What was going on this evening?" he asked.

"Oh, a sort of a concert—a great bore. By the way, Miss Lefort was playing—Marie, you know."

"And how did she get on?" asked Warden, with some little interest.

"Oh, she seemed all right. But I know nothing about that sort of thing."

"And did the fair Angélique perform?"

"No; but she was there with Miss Raymond."

"And did not Miss Raymond keep you from being bored?"

"Did I say I was bored? The fact is, Warden, I want your advice about something."

"Really? Well, I will give you the best I can."

"I know you will, old fellow."

"And what is it this time? Love or war?"

"Why, you see," Hugh was beginning, when a peal of thunder was heard at the door.

"The devil!" exclaimed Warden.

"What is it?"

"I'm afraid I must open. If I don't, he's just the man to break in. I suppose he saw the light in the window."

"But who is it?"

"Do you remember Barton of Tudor?"

"Of course I do, though I never met him."

"So much the better for you. I am extremely sorry, but I'm afraid I must let him in."

"I am sorry too, for I really wanted to see you."

And so Barton came in, bearing a bottle in triumph under his arm.

"Beg your pardon, Warden, for being so long. Damn it, I can't be drunk, and yet I see two brandy-bottles. Or have you been sending out and taking a mean advantage? All right—the more the merrier. We'll make a night of it."

"Really, Barton—"

"Oh, you be damned! Mayn't a man make himself at home in another man's rooms? Why, there are two Wardens!"

"Indeed there are not. This is Mr. Lester, the member for Denethorp; and we have business to talk over. I told you I had an engagement."

"But where the devil am I to go, then?"

"Why not go home?"

"Warden, you're a milksop. Come—be hospitable for once. The night is young; and, what's more, I'm damned if I go home!—there."

"You see?" said Warden to Hugh in despair.

"I know this fellow, and that it is impossible to get rid of him."

And there was in fact nothing to be done but for Hugh to make an appointment to see Warden at his chambers in the morning, to plead that he was bad company—as, in fact, he felt—and to go home, leaving Warden to the mercy of his "old man of the sea."

He returned to the Temple at about ten o'clock the next morning.

"Why, how's this?" he said on seeing the aspect of Warden's room; "you have been having a debauch with a vengeance."

"It is simply the most terrible animal I ever heard of," said Warden, smiling to cover his ill-humor; "here he is still, you see;" and he pointed to a sofa on which lay Barton asleep—not like a man who is working off the effects of much brandy, but like a child that has taken nothing stronger than milk-and-water in its life.

"What in the world are you going to do with him?"

"God knows! At Cambridge, I believe, he used to sleep four-and-twenty hours at a stretch, when he slept at all, without waking. And where could one send him? He told me last night that he has given up living under a roof altogether."

"Oh, let the poor devil sleep it out. Shall we go out and talk somewhere else?"

"And leave no one here but this infernal beast? He would smash every thing to pieces

to look for liquor, or bring more in and get drunk again."

"That is true. Well, he's sound asleep, and one will know when he wakes, I suppose?"

"Trust him for letting us know that."

"Well, then—but I'm afraid I'm boring you."

"My dear fellow!"

"It's all about myself, you know—or, rather, it isn't. Would you mind my lighting a cigar?"

"A hundred, if you like."

"Thank you. Well, then, you see—I dare say you'll think me an infernal ass—but as you know the people, and all that, you see—will you take a cigar yourself?"

"No, thank you."

"Well, then, the fact is—I am engaged to be married."

"Indeed! Then let me be the first to congratulate yourself and the lady. Am I wrong in guessing that it is to Miss Raymond?"

"No, it's not to Miss Raymond, and that's just the difficulty. You see, my aunt seems to have set her heart on my marrying Miss Raymond."

Somehow Warden felt relieved, though of course it could be nothing to him.

"Am I to know who the lady is?" he asked.

"Mademoiselle Lefort."

Warden naturally thought of the election gossip about Lester and Marie. There must have been something in it, then, after all.

"The devil it is!" he exclaimed, but with a meaning very different from what Hugh supposed.

"And why not?" asked the latter, a little sharply.

"It is impossible you can be engaged to her."

"What do you mean? It is possible, because I am."

"Does Miss Lefort know?"

"How could I be engaged without?"

"But it is impossible. There must be some mistake."

"What in the world can you mean? How could I be mistaken about such a thing?"

"I mean that it can not be."

"But why?"

"Because I happen to know; but I can not tell you why—I can only tell you that you must most certainly be mistaken, though I grant it is strange that you should be. I know the Leforts well, and I assure you, as your friend and theirs, that it is quite impossible."

Of course it was quite possible, he thought, that Hugh might have declared his passion, and that Marie, in her innocence and stupidity and shyness, and with the weight of her secret embarrassing her, might not have repulsed him in a manner that he had understood. How he wished that she had been free not to have repulsed him at all! He would have yielded her to Hugh, or to any one else, with the best will in the world. Hugh, knowing what he knew, could only stare in blank amazement. If he thought any thing, it was that Warden, as his friend, considered it a friendly thing to save him from a *mésalliance*.

"Really, Warden, I must know what you mean. Indeed I have a right to an explanation—if you have any to give."

As he spoke, another thought suggested itself to him. Warden was an older acquaintance of

the family than he, and had known Angélique from childhood. Was it not possible that he might be a rival?

Warden saw the thought show itself in his friend's face, and he also saw that he was himself in a difficult position. Of course he supposed that he knew his wife well enough to assume that Hugh must necessarily be mistaken in thinking what he did appear to think; but still, unfortunately, it would never do to allow him to remain in his error. Marie, in self-defense, might have her secret wrung from her; and so he was ready enough to tell himself that it was his duty to spare her from persecution, and Hugh from running his head against so hard a wall.

"My dear fellow," he said, "you can not marry Miss Lefort. I will tell you why, if you will promise to respect her secret; and you will then see that you must be mistaken in thinking that she could have promised to be your wife."

Hugh turned pale.

"It must not be known on any account. There are good reasons why, which I am not bound to tell you, seeing that they affect other persons; nor will you therefore ask me. But I am bound to save you from an unprofitable pursuit; and I will therefore rely upon your honor not to let what I do say go farther than ourselves. Do you promise?"

Heaven knows what Hugh expected to hear; but he nerved himself as well as he could to hear his doom, whatever it might be. Of course he was equally prepared not to believe any story that might reflect upon Angélique.

"If it is no scandal—if it is nothing that my speaking may remove," he answered.

"Oh, it is no scandal," Warden answered, "but the contrary. It is that she is the wife of another man."

Hugh started forward. "That she is married? No—that I can not believe."

"But when I tell you that I know it—that it can be proved?"

"Prove it, then."

"Did I not say that I could tell you nothing that affects others? It is enough for you that I am bound in honor to say no more."

The word "honor" always acted upon Hugh Lester like a spell. "But I am not bound to make no inquiries," he answered. "I am not going to give her up for a word, especially as, if what you say is true—if you are not mistaken, I mean—I should have to believe that it is she who has deceived me. I will ask you nothing more; but I will go straight to her."

"What! and force her secret from her?"

"Yes, by God! It seems to me that I have some right in it also."

Somehow Warden had not calculated upon this. Perhaps he had relied too much upon the power of managing Hugh which he supposed himself to have acquired.

"Indeed you must do no such thing."

"What?"

Hugh spoke more in astonishment than in anger at being thus addressed by one to whom he was quite as much a patron as a friend.

"I mean that if you do—"

Hugh somehow felt that the advantage was with himself.

"Well—and if I do?"

"I think it very likely that she would deny it."

"And that I should have to decide between her solemn word and your word, which you refuse to prove? So that is your reason for saying that I must not? Very well, then, I will not; for I should not dream of doubting her."

It did not suit Warden to quarrel with Hugh, otherwise the last speech gave him ample opportunity, and, had he been of warmer blood, would have had its effect, though on Hugh's part unintentionally. The latter had merely meant to say that he would take Angélique's word against that of all the world.

"Then," said Warden, not knowing exactly what to say, and speaking slowly to give himself time to consider, "if you do speak to Marie—to Miss—"

"To Marie?"

"To Miss Lefort, then. If—"

"But why did you say Marie?"

"Are we not speaking of her?"

"My dear fellow!" Hugh exclaimed, his face brightening, "do you mean to say you thought I meant Marie?"

Warden blushed scarlet, for about the first time in his life. "I did think so, certainly."

"Good God! how you frightened me! What! is Marie married?"

"You will surely respect her secret now?"

"Oh, I will be like the tomb. But what on earth made you think I meant Marie?"

"I suppose I was stupid. So you are engaged to Angélique?" he added in a meditative tone.

"That is what I wanted to tell you," Hugh was beginning; but Warden scarcely heard him. His mind was flying off to other things.

"I see," he said at last. "And Miss Clare objects, I suppose—or would object if she knew."

"She objects very strongly indeed."

"And how can I advise you?"

"You see I don't want Angélique—Miss Lefort—to marry a beggar. And my aunt is so set against it, that—"

"Then my advice would be to do nothing in a hurry. Has Miss Clare—if I may ask—talked to you about this—told you any thing about what she means to do?"

"She is so set on my marrying Alice Raymond—who I don't suppose would have me if I asked her—that if I marry as I must and ought, Miss Raymond will take my place altogether; and you know my aunt—that she does not speak without meaning it. I don't care about that, you know, only for Angélique; and because I like my aunt too much, and am too grateful to her to want to quarrel with her if I can help it. It's very odd that she can't see the thing in the same way as I do."

"Well, certainly, one would think that marriage is a matter in which a man should judge for himself. And if I know Miss Clare, she likes you too well for things not to come all right."

"Ah, you don't know her as I do."

"Of course not. But look here, Lester. You know that Miss Clare is for some reason or other inclined to put some confidence in me?"

"Naturally, after what you have done for us."

"Well then, if I, a disinterested third person, were to put the thing calmly before her—I suppose you have quite made up your own mind on the matter?"

"Quite."

"And I congratulate you on your choice. Miss Lefort's only fault is want of fortune; and what is that to you? Then if, as I say, I spoke quietly to Miss Clare—"

"Would you really?"

"Of course I would; though of course I can not tell what the result would be. By-the-way, does Miss Lefort herself know of Miss Clare's objection?"

"Why, no. There was no need, you see."

"So much the better. There can be no reason why she should feel that there is any personal objection to her on the part of Miss Clare if it can be avoided."

"You are the best fellow that ever lived, Warden."

"Oh, nonsense. I haven't done any thing, and most likely never shall."

"And are you likely to be going down to Denethorp soon?" asked Hugh, with all the selfish impatience of a man in love.

"I dare say I may be, at Christmas."

"Not before?"

"How can I?"

"Well, I suppose not. Then you think I'd better not tell Angélique?"

"I should say certainly not. You really mean what you say, of course."

"Certainly. I intend to make her my wife, whatever may happen."

"Well, 'the course of true love,' you know. You may feel quite safe that in the end Miss Clare will be only too glad to change her mind."

"Well, you are a good fellow, and I can't thank you enough. By-the-way, why don't you go in for Alice Raymond yourself—a girl with no nonsense about her, and a good fortune besides?"

Warden smiled. "What! a country doctor's son go in for the lady of New Court?"

"Oh, why not?" It is wonderful how cheap men hold what they do not want.

"I hope you are not breaking her heart."

"If I am, you had better heal it."

"Oh, this is my wife," replied Warden, laying his hand upon a volume of "Coke upon Littleton." "And now, just consider it all right—and don't make yourself unhappy by thinking about difficulties."

"You really think it will come all smooth?"

"Of course I do—and of course it will. Holloa! What's that? By Jove! I had quite forgotten that guest of mine."

What he had heard was the creaking of the sofa, caused by the return to waking life of Dick Barton, who, after a yawn or two, succeeded in twisting himself into a position that was very tolerably upright.

"The devil!" he exclaimed, after another prodigious stretch. "I say, have you got any thing to drink? I'm confoundedly thirsty."

"Soda-water?"

"Soda be blowed! *Kunos crinè*—a hair of the dog, man."

"I'm afraid you devoured the dog between you, hair and all, before you fell asleep," said Lester, who had recovered something of his usual good-humor.

"And who the devil are you? Damn you, Warden, you can't have drunk the whole of the three bottles to your own cheek."

"Will you have some tea?"

"Faugh!"

"Well, then, you won't have any thing at all," said Warden, who had begun to guess how his enemy ought to be treated.

"I call that damned unfriendly of you. I shall go at once—and damn me if I ever come here again. Warden, you're a —, and I always thought so, and now I know it. By-the-way," he added, feeling in his pockets, "I'm cleaned out. Could either of you fellows lend me half a crown?"

"And is this the Dick Barton that was to do such wonderful things?" asked Lester, as the door closed. "How does he live?"

Warden shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"So much for genius!" said the practical man.

"Poor devil!" said Lester, "one must try and give him a chance—what's the good of being in the house else?" And so, after a renewal of his thanks, he too left the room, leaving Warden to "Coke upon Littleton."

Warden did work at "Coke upon Littleton," but he also worked at something else besides.

CHAPTER XII.

WARDEN had no particular inclination to spend his Christmas at home: he was not a person of domestic tendencies; his father bored him, and he was not fond of the society of his father's friends. Not even did he care to cultivate the acquaintance of Mr. Brown, even though he was an attorney's managing clerk. But still, much to his sister's delight, he announced at the beginning of December that he was about to pay them a short visit. It was nothing more than a very ordinary sort of coincidence that Miss Raymond was going to spend her Christmas at Earl's Dene. Hugh ought to have spent his there also; but he was a man of many engagements, and felt rather afraid of his visit besides, for he also felt instinctively that the breach between himself and his aunt had practically begun, and that he should, as it were, be making Earl's Dene his home under false pretenses. Moreover, he knew that his friend was going down, and fancied that it would be better for his own cause if he himself kept out of the way and left the field clear for the abler strategist.

And so Warden went down accordingly, listened to his father's complaints of the rival doctors, and of the pane of glass through which the wind still blew, received the admiring homage of his sister, heard Mr. Brown retail the small gossip of the place, and dined upon lukewarm mutton. But he did not let his domestic enjoyments detain him from making an early call at Earl's Dene.

He found Miss Clare not improved in health by any means; but she gave him a most cordial welcome, not only for his own sake, but because she hoped to get news of Hugh in respect of the matter about which she was most anxious.

"You still see something of Hugh?" she asked, after a word or two of greeting.

"Oh, very often. I think I may consider that we are friends."

"I hope so. I was in hopes that he would have spent Christmas down here."

"You see he has so many engagements."

"Still I should have thought he might have been able to spare a day or two. But this is but a dull house for a young man to come to, I know."

Warden looked his protest.

"By-the-way, I have one visitor, though—your old acquaintance, Miss Raymond of New Court."

"Indeed?"

"She, too, has seen something of you in town, she tells me. By-the-way, as we are talking about Denethorp people, what has become of those Leforts since the father met with that unfortunate accident?"

"Oh, they are in London doing what they can."

"Miss Raymond tells me that the niece means to go on the stage."

"Yes, I believe that is so."

Of course she was vainly trying to get an opening for finding out whether and to what extent Warden was in her nephew's confidence. At last, true to her despotic instincts that never allowed her to procrastinate or beat about the bush, she said,

"I, too, may consider you one of Hugh's friends?"

"One of his and yours, Miss Clare."

"I am not going to ask you to commit a breach of confidence: besides, I know that you would not do so, if I did. But has he ever mentioned these young women to you?"

"In what way?"

"You know there were some absurd stories about him here?"

"Oh, at the election. No one minds election reports."

"You see so much depends upon the marriage of one in Hugh's position."

"No doubt."

"It would never do even to run the risk of Earl's Dene falling into the hands of an actress—of a Papist."

"Of course not."

"You see, living as I do, there are so few people I can trust—and I suppose that as one gets older one gets more anxious and nervous—at least I am anxious that Hugh, who is as if he were my son, should do rightly in every thing. Now you, who are his friend, and have some influence, I know—"

"I fear, Miss Clare, you overrate my power."

"Oh, no. Men listen often to their friends when they are deaf to their mothers—you can talk to him as men talk. You understand me?"

"You may be sure that any influence I may have over Mr. Lester shall be used as you would approve, and for his real good."

"You promise?"

"Faithfully."

"Thank you, Mr. Warden. You have taken a weight off my mind. You will, then—you of all people will know how—save him from the danger of—you know what I mean?"

"I promise to do my best."

"You might tell him, in case of necessity, what I have told him also—that if he continues to be bent upon this impossible marriage—"

"I would rather hear no more, Miss Clare."

"But you had better. You know that I always do what I say; and if he is obstinate, Alice Raymond shall be mistress of Earl's Dene. And you may tell Miss Lefort so, also. I imagine that she, at least, will not be obstinate when she hears that."

That she was perfectly in earnest was sufficiently proved by her forgetting her pride so far as to take one of her subjects into her private confidence in order that she might work with greater certainty. But it must, nevertheless, have been a bitter pill for her to swallow.

"Surely, Miss Clare, you can not be speaking seriously?"

"But I am, indeed. And, after all, it is not likely that he should really be guilty of such madness."

"Most unlikely, I should say."

"But still you will remember what I have said; you will watch, warn, save him, if you can—and that by any means?"

"I will do all I can."

"I felt sure that I might rely upon you; otherwise I should not have said what I have to you. Be sure that we shall not be ungrateful."

"I hope you do not think—is it not only my duty?"

"But we have our duties, too, and gratitude is among them," she said, in royal fashion, as she held out her hand. "And now you will stay to lunch? I see Miss Raymond coming back from her ride."

Miss Clare, as queen of Denethorp, of course considered herself as only giving orders to, and promoting to high trust and confidence, one of her subjects who had proved his devotion to the reigning house when she gave Warden charge of the crown-prince, and not as in any way laying a burden upon him. She felt gratitude, as she said; but, in her eyes, he was doing no more than his duty to his liege lady in undertaking to keep her heir from forming an unsuitable alliance. What his own private views might be were nothing to her, nor did she even remember that he might possibly have any. And if he had, what could they matter even to himself when the interests of Earl's Dene were concerned? Nevertheless the interview did open out to him a new and strangely exciting train of thought, of which the burden was, "If it were not for Marie!"

Putting her out of the question altogether—supposing there was no such person in existence—it would of course be open to him to try his chance with Miss Raymond, as any body else might, without any reference to the coming estrangement between Miss Clare and her nephew. It was true that his birth was not such as to facilitate his entry into a county family. But then, would he be the first poor gentleman who had, by marrying an heiress, founded a family of his own? *Ce que femme veut, Dieu le veut*; and fortune favors the bold. His father and sister might be provided for elsewhere; and for himself, he felt that he could hold his own were he to marry into the ranks of the peerage itself. After all, as the son of a professional man, as a fellow of his college, as a distinguished member of his university, as a barrister—a word that then meant far more than it has since come to mean—as, in the future, a member of Parliament,

and Heaven knows what besides, it would soon be forgotten that the professional man whose son he was was only Doctor Warden of Denethorp, and that his mother was the daughter of a Redchester druggist. This he might have done as a matter of course; but now he felt, after his interview with Miss Clare, that, were he only free, he might do something very much more. He smiled to himself as he remembered how he felt when he traversed, in Hugh Lester's company, the stage of road between Redchester and Denethorp. If Hugh should marry Angélique, then Miss Raymond would be a prize worth the winning indeed. He knew as well as any body that Miss Clare invariably meant what she said, and he thought he knew how to manage her, in case Miss Raymond proved favorable. If it were only not for Marie!

But as, unfortunately, it was impossible to put Marie out of the question, it was all impossible together. Still he was not one to throw away even the odd ends of string, the scraps of paper, and the stray pins that chance affords. "Waste not, want not"—every thing may come in usefully some day. At all events, there was no use in being impolite to Miss Raymond; and so, to avoid Charybdis, he fell into Scylla—that is to say, he made himself very polite to her indeed. Nor did the young lady herself object, for she had a tendency to hero-worship, and since the contest Warden had remained the hero of the Tory part of the country-side.

He enjoyed his lunch very much, nor did he again remember his wife's existence until he was half-way home. And then, when he did call her to mind, he was angry, not with himself, but with Circumstance, who had treated him so unfairly and so unkindly. At last, like every body who gets angry with Circumstance, he began to recollect certain bits and scraps of consolation with which men flatter themselves that they are not such very poor creatures, after all, but, indeed, rather the contrary—such as "Man is the architect of his own fortune;" "The mould of a man's fortunes is in his own hands;" "*Vouloir c'est pouvoir*;" "The wise man makes more opportunities than he finds;" "*Aut inveniam viam aut faciam*;" and other similar specimens of proverbial nonsense.

In a mind like his, no practical idea that is once sown remains quite barren. He could not entertain the thought that he might, under other circumstances, have become master of Earl's Dene without at the same time entertaining the wish that it were still possible; and he could not entertain the wish without being led to consider whether, after all, its fulfillment were quite as impossible as it at first sight appeared. "Is, in truth, any thing impossible?" he thought; "Napoleon denied the existence of the word."

People who quote the authority of Napoleon in this matter, generally seem to forget that their authority lived to find himself mistaken.

"So you've been up at Madam's have you?" asked Mark's father, as they sat over the fire after dinner. "Quite right. The old lady's been uncommon civil since the election. Game, you know, and all that. We may cut out that ass Smith yet, my boy. Miss Raymond's up there too, isn't she? Ah, a fine match that'll be for Master Hugh."

"Ah," winked Mr. Brown, "we know something about that, Mr. Mark; don't we?"

"Do we?"

"I expect Miss Alice was nigh losing our member. We know when. I wonder what's become of Miss Mary now, up in town?" Here he gave another wink. "And I wonder whether our member knows? For my part, though, I always thought 'twas the other one had most style."

Mark felt a strong desire to kick him. After all, Marie was his wife, much as he might wish that she were not.

"You seem to know much more about it than either I or Mr. Lester," he answered with a coldness that made Mr. Brown stare.

"I wonder when the wedding will be, and if it'll be at Denethorp!" exclaimed Lorry. "I think Miss Raymond so pretty, Mark; don't you?"

"I know some one prettier," said Mr. Brown, with a leer at Lorry, for which her brother would have gladly kicked him again, especially as he saw that she only blushed.

"By-the-way, Brown," asked the surgeon, "that's a bad case up Gorsley way. Have you any thing to do with it?"

"We, Mr. Warden? We don't do criminal business. But what's the rights of it?"

"Why, hanging's about the rights of it, I reckon. Man and wife, you know—tired of her, and keeping company with another woman. She won't have him till the wife's dead. So what does he do, when his wife's asleep in bed, but just quietly go to work with his fingers and thumbs, you know, till what d'ye-call was induced, and she went off the hooks? I made the *post mortem* with what's his name of Gorsley—brain congested, lungs gorged, tongue protruding half an inch, no end of *ecchymosis* just where it ought to be, you know—larynx, and *conjunctive*, and all that—"

"And how did he kill her?" asked Mr. Brown.

"Why, aren't the appearances as clear as daylight? Throttled her, of course, and no mistake about it."

"La! how horrid!" exclaimed Lorry.

"H'm!" said Mr. Brown; "marry in haste, and repent at leisure. Well, what I always say is, as a man makes his bed, so he must lie."

Why should Mark Warden, the scholar and the gentleman, have felt a half-guilty sensation at the narration of this brutal and vulgar crime? But he did feel it: nor was Mr. Brown's not very original remark without its sting. After the quotations from historians and philosophers in which he had been indulging, the homely platitudes of the lawyer's clerk was a terrible piece of bathos but it was not ineffective.

CHAPTER XIV.

NIGHT brings counsel. "Well, I suppose I must yield to fate," was Warden's first thought when he awoke the next morning. "But still—" he added; which meant that he had at all events made up his mind that his friend should marry Angélique Lefort. He could not see his way to the end of the game; but still that was no reason why he should not play such good cards as he held in his hand. Something might come of them; and nothing could come of his

keeping his word to Miss Clare. Indeed he had, after all, promised nothing definitely.

He did not return to London at once, but was a good deal about Earl's Dene—making love, any one would almost have said who did not know the circumstances. To a certain extent he was not altogether responsible for the length to which he went in cultivating the acquaintance of Miss Raymond; for the flirtation naturally gratified the vanity from which marriage does not exempt a man, and he thought he could trust himself not to go too far. He also made himself extremely useful to Miss Clare herself, and, in spite of his dislike for Mr. Brown and his fellows, strove not unsuccessfully, to make himself popular among them also; at all events, to make them look up to him, which, with his views, was more to the purpose than making himself popular. Meanwhile, it was characteristic of him that, while dreaming of shadows, he never for a moment loosened his hold upon the substance, for he never passed a day without reading law for a certain number of hours.

At last, however, the day came when it was necessary for him to return, and of course he called at Earl's Dene to say good-bye. His last words to Miss Clare consisted of a renewal of his promise to do what he could to prevent her nephew's marriage. To Miss Raymond he bade a simple "good-bye"—spoken, however, in a tone that meant much, and that made her think. Nor were her thoughts unkindly. She was not likely to fall in love consciously without being asked to do so; but she had got as far as thinking it by no means unlikely that she might be asked. Besides this, she could not help seeing, with a woman's instinct in such matters, that Warden was strong enough to be her master; and when a woman sees that, she is half won already. It need not be said that her first unreasonable and unconscious prejudice against him had taken flight ages ago.

As soon as he found himself once more in London, it was, no doubt, his duty to pay his wife a visit; but he, thinking no doubt that that would keep, and that other things would not, first called at the chambers of the pleader with whom he was reading, and then went to Hugh's lodgings in Bruton Street.

"Warden, what an age you've been gone! and what news, old fellow? Will you have some breakfast? When did you come back? Did you see my aunt? Did you say any thing to her? Did—"

"I saw Miss Clare," answered Warden, gravely, in a tone which made Hugh's countenance fall.

"Well?"

"She says—well, the long and short of it is, that if I were you I would just give the whole thing up."

"Then there goes Earl's Dene—that's all."

"Why, you don't mean to say—"

"I do, though. I'm sorry, of course, for her sake, you know; but she must make up her mind to marry a poor man instead of a rich one: and so that's over."

"But, my dear fellow, just think—"

"Angélique has more claim on me now than my aunt, after all. And my aunt herself wouldn't want me to be such a cur as to sell my *love and my faith* for all the land in the world."

"Your wife ought to be a proud woman, Lester."

"Rubbish! And so there's an end of it. I'll write to my aunt at once."

Warden laid his hand on his shoulder. "I have been but a bad ambassador, I fear," he said; "but—"

"And I have not thanked you for troubling you about my affairs. I only wish I could see my way to thanking you as I should like to."

"Not a word about thanks, pray! But, I was going to say, I should advise you not to write just now."

"But surely—"

"I know what you would say. But had you not better wait until you have seen Miss Lefort herself?"

"You speak as though you doubted her."

"Not the least. But—"

"But what then?"

"Why, the result would be this: Miss Clare would probably not answer you. But she would leave no stone unturned to prevent this marriage. She would take care to let Miss Lefort know that by marrying you she was ruining you for life. And if Miss Lefort is as generous as I have no doubt she is, she would refuse to marry you—not for her own sake, but for yours. No; see her first—this very day, if you like—and get her promise; and then write to Miss Clare as soon as you please."

"I dare say you are right. Then I will go to Angélique at once."

Warden considered. It was more than probable that Angélique, when she learned from her lover how matters stood, would throw him over, not for his sake, but for her own. It was not from any special knowledge of the character of Angélique that the thought arose, but rather from a knowledge of what he himself would have done had he been in the same situation. Indeed, would not any man or woman of sense have done so? So he had to a slight extent to draw upon his imagination.

"By-the-way," he said, "I doubt if you can see her to-day."

"Why not?"

"I have been at the house, and she will not be in till the evening."

"And in the evening she will be at the theatre. It is damned unlucky."

"At the theatre?"

"Yes; don't you know? She is going to come out for the first time."

"The devil she is! I hope Miss Clare won't know that, at all events. She will object ten times more if she hears that your wife has appeared on the stage."

"Then it will be all the more for me not to let Angélique suffer for so unjust a prejudice," said Hugh, loftily. "I will see her this evening, anyhow—at the theatre itself, for that matter. But don't go, old fellow. How the deuce is one to get through the day till then?"

"I would stay with pleasure, only I have an engagement that I must keep. Shall I look you up to-night after the play is over?"

"Do; and if I'm not in, wait for me."

Warden at once caught the first coach that was passing.

"To Berners Street," he said; and then settled himself down to think; an art that he

had of late been cultivating rather too assiduously in some directions, and neglecting too much in others.

Fortunately, he was not obliged to lose any time, for Marie was out, and Angélique at home. She was reading a manuscript, and the room looked more like a milliner's workshop than ever. She rose as he entered, and smiled graciously.

"Ah, Mr. Warden," she said, "you have come just in time."

"For what?"

"To-night I make my *début*; and I shall expect you to come and hiss me."

"I will come, of course; but otherwise I do not intend to be alone in a crowd. What is the part, and where?"

"Here is the bill."

"But I don't see your name?"

"But you see that of Miss Marchmont—we are the same. I play Donna Inez."

"By-the-way, I have seen a friend of ours, who will also come, and not hiss you, I should say."

"And who is that, pray?—Miss Raymond?"

"Scarcely, seeing that she is in —shire. Shall you be angry if I tell you a secret?"

She looked at him quickly and sharply.

"I suppose you mean that you want to tell me one?"

"Exactly so."

"And that you have come on purpose to tell it?"

"That is so, also."

She looked a little anxious. "You had better tell it then, and run the risk of my being angry. I adore secrets."

"It is this, then. I have just come from Denethorp."

"Is that all?"

"Not quite. When there, I did myself the honor of calling at Earl's Dene." She watched his face, and saw that he was smiling in a way that half alarmed, half reassured her—as, in fact, he intended. He went on. "I do not know whether you know that the great Madam Clare has some belief in my wisdom?"

"You are very mysterious."

"Well, it seems that you have made a conquest."

She tossed her head. "It is very possible," she answered.

"So possible that it must be so. But, I fear, not of the great lady."

"And why do you say all this to me?"

"To fulfill a promise. To tell you that she will never consent to her nephew's marriage."

"Indeed! I am very much obliged to her. And, in return for your secret, I will give you a piece of advice."

"What is that?"

"Not to meddle with what does not concern you."

"I beg your pardon. Mr. Lester is my friend; and what concerns him, concerns me also."

"Then speak to him, if you think I am not fit to marry him. I think it scarcely usual among gentlemen to do as you seem to be doing. You know nothing about the matter. Are you in his confidence as well as in Miss Clare's?"

"I am; and have spoken to him also."

"And he sent you here?" She began to be

terribly afraid that her game was lost—that Hugh had yielded, and had been ashamed to tell her so in person. Like Mark Warden, she was apt to judge of what other people would do by what she would have done in their place; and she, too, was a person of sense.

"No—not at all."

"Then why do you come?"

"To appeal to your generosity on behalf of my friend."

"Ah, I begin to understand. You mean that Miss Clare will disinherit him?"

"I fear so. Indeed, I am sure of it if—" He paused.

"If what?"

"If he remains true to you; if he marries you, and—if *she knows it*." He spoke the last words with a marked and special emphasis which she could not fail to perceive.

He saw that she understood as much of his thought as he wished her to understand. But she looked inquiringly, nevertheless.

"You know how straightforward he is," he replied to her look.

"That is true. And I, too, should be the last to advise deception. You are right. It is not for me to ruin him."

She spoke so seriously that he stared at her for a moment in astonishment. Then he smiled.

"You will refuse to marry him, then?"

She turned away her face.

"If it must be so," she said, in a low tone.

"And about this evening?" He did not think it worth while to waste words of sympathy.

"Let him come to the theatre."

"Of course you will not tell him that I have told you this? I have been acting solely for his interest, and I should not like him to quarrel with me for having acting as his friend."

"Of course not. And now I dare say you will not mind leaving me to myself. '*If she knows it!*'" she added to herself, with a smile.

"Well, I think I am able to keep a secret from Madam Clare."

"Well, I have kept my promise," thought Warden to himself. "If Hugh Lester will make a fool of himself, that is not my fault."

And to a certain extent he really persuaded himself that it was not.

CHAPTER XV.

So far as the world at large was concerned, this was the history of that evening, according to the dramatic critic of the "*Trumpet*."

"Last night was produced at this house, for the first time, a new musical drama entitled '*Faith's Reward*,' written by Mr. —, the music being composed by M. Prosper. The plot is briefly this," etc. "The music is excellent," etc. "Miss Marchmont, the *débutante*, however, must be pronounced a failure. She is remarkably pretty, and that is always something; but unfortunately, in her case, that is all. It often happens that a first appearance calls for indulgence; but when the *débutante*, far from showing any symptom of nervousness, gives by her carelessness of demeanor and apparent indifference to what she is about, the impression that she thinks herself too good for her audience, for her fellow-actors.

and for her part, while her whole style of singing and acting proves that she is very much mistaken, she deserves the reverse of indulgence. We are afraid, however, that an actress so careless of applause will be equally careless of censure; and if that is the case, it will be unnecessary for us to give ourselves the trouble of breaking a fly upon the wheel. We should say that a few years' diligent practice of her profession in the provinces would be extremely beneficial to her, as to many others we could name whose strength is not equal to their courage."

The truth is, however, that the preoccupation of the *débutante* in question was very excusable indeed. She was not like Warden, who could grasp at shadows without dropping substances; nor could she throw herself into Mr. —'s comedy while she was at the same time playing the principal part in her own.

* * * * *

Don Perez. "I go, then, proud girl; but if I read woman's soul aright, thou wilt yet be the bride of Don Perez."

Donna Inez. "Never! Is it thus thou readest woman's soul? Thinkest thou that all Gollonda's treasure would buy the heart of Inez? Rather will I wander in poverty with my Ferdinand, than dwell in halls of dazzling light with thee."

"If weeping lips and smiling eyes
Within a mossy dell,
Yet through the roaring of the skies,
Oh, bid me not farewell!"

"Go—and amid thy vassal thralls
Awake the wonder wild;
But Inez scorns thy dazzling halls,
The free, the gypsy child!"

[Exit.]

"Ah, Mr. Lester, how you startled me! I scarcely thought you would be here. I am afraid you will not be very well amused."

"Can you give me a minute or two presently? I have something to say to you."

"Not quite so loud, please. They will hear you in the house."

"When can I speak to you?"

"Oh, now, if you like; only we had better get out of the way. Now, Hugh, what is it? You look very grave. It is nothing serious?"

"Indeed it is, Angélique. Have you to go on again soon?"

"Not for fifteen minutes at least."

"I fear I have done wrongly, Angélique, in not having told you before that, in marrying me, you run the risk of marrying a very poor man indeed. You were right when you thought that my aunt would object to my marriage."

"You come, then, to say good-bye? Do not be afraid. I release you." And she sighed profoundly.

"Angélique! Can you—"

"Good-bye, then." She held out her hand, turned away her head, and sighed more profoundly still.

"Do you, then, not love me?"

She threw him for answer one of those glances through the eyelids in which she excelled.

"Then do not," he replied, "let me hear another word of my being released, unless you fear poverty."

"Hugh!"

"Do you think I come to ask you to release Angélique? Did you think me so base, so

cowardly? Did you think that I would sell you for Earl's Dene?"

"Ah, if it could be! But no—I can not consent to be the cause of your ruin."

"Angélique, I shall begin to think that you never really loved me."

"How can you speak so cruelly? You know that I have—that I—" "do," she added, in a look.

"Angélique, if you do not love me, it is I that release you. Tell me so, and— But if you do love me, there is only one way in which you can prove your love. I will accept no other."

"If I thought I could really make you happy—could really compensate you for what you lose—"

"Could I be happy without you?"

"I do not deserve so great a sacrifice."

"It is no sacrifice. Do you think I care a straw for what I lose when I think of what I shall gain? I swear by God that I will not have Earl's Dene without you. In any case, I will refuse it."

"And is all the sacrifice—I must call it so—to be on your side?"

"Do you not sacrifice yourself sufficiently by giving yourself to me?"

"Ah, Hugh! you are too noble. No, I can not find it in my heart to struggle against you—against myself any longer. I will, then, be every thing to you; my life shall be spent in trying to give you no cause for regret."

"Dearest!" Had she not checked him, he, forgetting as he did where they were, would have taken her in his arms at once.

"But—I must impose a condition."

"What condition?"

"After all, I feel that I am acting selfishly. Whatever you may say, I can not but know that I am indulging my own heart to your loss. For my own sake, let me too, make a sacrifice. I will be your wife—Heaven knows how gladly! But I will not, I ought not, unless you promise me this."

"What is it?"

"A reconciliation with one who loves you as Miss Clare must love you, is always possible. I will not let you throw away the chance of it. I declare to you that my whole life would be spent in misery if I thought I had not done all for you that you will let me do. I would have refused you now if I could have done so, but I could not. But I will make another effort to refuse you, unless you promise that Miss Clare shall not know of our engagement until we are married."

Hugh looked grave, and almost frowned.

"I am sorry you wish this, Angélique. My aunt has a right to know. Besides, to conceal it would look as though I wished to keep Earl's Dene by deceit—by a sort of fraud."

"Of course she must not think that. But I am so afraid—until we can not be parted, what might not happen to part us? If Miss Clare is so resolved, what might she not do or say—"

"My aunt would never do any thing underhand."

"Of course not. But so many things might happen. You promise, then? Then now I am quite happy."

"But, dearest—"

"Ah! there is Monsieur Prosper coming to speak to me. But don't go. Monsieur Prosper, this is Mr. Lester—an old friend of mine."

"Monsieur, I am charmed. But I would speak with you, Mademoiselle. It is great pity so charming a young lady should never have been in love."

Lester stared at so extraordinary a mode of address. Angélique looked at him and smiled.

"What makes you think I never have been?" she asked Monsieur Prosper. "Is it because I have never been in love with you?"

"Because you sing just as if you had no heart, Mademoiselle. That is why. Excuse me Monsieur;" and he passed on to resume his post at the conductor's desk. Lester smiled in his turn: he felt that he knew better.

"You know, dearest," he said, when Monsieur Prosper had left them, "that I can refuse you nothing. But if I yield to you in this, there must be no delay in our marriage."

She looked at him affectionately, and suffered him to hold her hand for a moment; but not for so long a moment that the caress could be observed by any curious eyes.

"We will not talk of that to-night, Hugh. I must consult with Marie, you know. Oh dear—I wish I had not got to go on again."

"And you will not repent joining yourself to one who will have no wealth but your love?"

"How often am I to say no? You are not like Monsieur Prosper, are you, and think that I have no heart?"

"I think so, indeed!—"

And he would no doubt have said something very much to the purpose, when "Miss Marchmont!" was called, and she had to leave the drama in which she was acting so well, for that in which, according to the "Trumpet," she was acting so indifferently.

Her lover was of course in ecstasies. He had never doubted her for a moment; but his triumph was none the less to hear from herself that she was willing to share his fortune, whatever it might be. How he was to support her he did not know; but his exultation was too great to be disturbed by a thought which the life that he had hitherto led entirely prevented his being able to bring home to himself. A man who has never known what it is to want for any thing, has great faith in the bounty of Fortune. To couple his own name with that of want, is as practically impossible as to seriously and really couple it with that of death. However it may be in metaphysics, no one can, in the actual world of fact, imagine what he has never known. Now Hugh had never in his life known what it was to want a hundred pounds without being able to get it; so that, *a fortiori*, to realize the probable want of a dinner for two was entirely out of the question. Rich in love and strength, utterly ignorant of what poverty means, he even looked forward to all the pleasures of necessary toil, and forgot to consider the wearing pains and bitter disappointments that accompany it with no less certainty. And surely—so it seemed to him—the strength and energy that had sufficed to make him the best man of his inches in all —shire, and in Cambridge to boot, would suffice to clear a path through the world that should be just broad enough for himself and for one other. There was time enough yet to determine the precise manner in which he should exert it, and, at least for the present evening, sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof. Of course, Angélique had no need

to indulge in gloomy anticipations. She would indeed be but a bungler if Miss Clare did not die in ignorance not only of the engagement, but of the marriage also. She knew her own power over her lover; and as he was honest and unsuspecting, she was not afraid of losing it. Besides, is it not the duty of a good wife to guard her husband's interests when he is inclined to destroy them? This part of her duty, at all events, she was resolved to fulfill to the letter.

The result of her resolution was, that not very long after the *début* of Miss Marchmont the following paragraph appeared in the "Trumpet:"

"Mr. H. Lester, M.P. for Denethorp, has accepted the stewardship of the Chiltern Hundreds. Mr. M. Warden of Denethorp has issued an address, in which he professes himself a supporter of the Government, and will, in case of a contest, be influentially supported. It is not improbable that Mr. Prescott, who unsuccessfully contested the borough at the last general election, will appear once more in the field."

Poor Angélique! She seemed to have turned out but a female Alnaschar, after all. The future Mrs. Lester of Earl's Dene, Lady Lester of Earl's Dene, Countess of Denethorp, and Heaven knows what besides, woke up to find herself Mrs. Lester of nowhere, the wife of a disinherited man who had not even a profession to fall back upon. Added to this, she had the mortification of seeing that she had been duped most cruelly. Had it not been for Warden's advice, for Warden's suggestions, she would still have been safe; and who but he could have betrayed her secret to Miss Clare? The question, "*Cui bono?*" was only too applicable, in its proper sense. It was certainly not herself, and it was as certainly not her husband, for the letter which he had written to his aunt upon his marriage she had taken care should not leave London; so that, as it turned out, she had herself made matters worse by causing Miss Clare to think that her nephew had endeavored to deceive her.

Hugh was infinitely distressed, not by the loss of Earl's Dene, but by this final proof that she who had been a mother to him all his life had withdrawn herself from him forever; for if she had loved him as a mother, he felt towards her as a son, and his distress was embittered by her complete silence. It needed all his happiness in the possession of Angélique, and all his consciousness of having done what was right and honorable, to reconcile him to this great loss. As to Warden, now that the field was clear, he was more than ever haunted by the thought, "If it were not for Marie!"

CHAPTER XVI.

It very soon appeared that the agony of nervousness to which Marie had been a victim in the presence of Monsieur Prosper had been the consequence, not of weakness, but of strength. There is no need to give any detailed account of the concert at which she had had to make her *début*, or of the many days preceding it which she spent in a constant succession of cold fits of fear. It is sufficient that the house at which her performance took place was one which in those days gave and withheld musical fame; and that

her nervousness was blown into a red-and-white glow of power as soon as she began to feel that strange and subtle sympathy between artist and audience which is at once both the cause and consequence of a true triumph, and to recognize in the perfect silence which is its outward sign the sure herald of a coming burst of applause. In a word, she was accepted at once as few *débutantes* are ever accepted; and the next day had almost become so famous as to have made enemies as well as friends. Nor were the former by any means without just ground for their depreciatory criticisms. It is true that she had taken every body by storm, but it was to a great extent in the teeth of orthodox tradition. "*C'était magnifique, mais ce n'était pas la guerre.*" But the most competent judges resemble the most ignorant in this, that they are only too glad to pardon a great many artistic faults for the sake of strength and enthusiasm, seeing that where there are the latter the former are safe to come in good time; but that where there are not, they can never either be given or acquired. In short, when least expecting it, Monsieur Prosper had become the discoverer of a new star, and he was certainly not the man to hide his light, whether it was original or reflected, under a bushel.

Marie herself, according to her nature, at first objected strongly to adopting at once the semi-public life that her patron urged upon her. She put it that she could not thus expect to support herself for some time; that meanwhile it was absolutely necessary for her to begin at once to earn her own bread and that of her little household; and that she could do this most effectually and safely by pursuing the more humble path of daily teaching that she had marked out for herself. But, explain her circumstances as she would, Monsieur Prosper would only say:

"The only road to the skies, Mademoiselle, is up the garret-stairs. Mozart climbed them, Moretti climbed them, I climbed them, every body who has ever done any thing has had to climb them; and you, Mademoiselle, are one whose duty for the present is to starve."

But though this was his theory, he obtained a few pupils for her in spite of it—just enough to keep the wolf actually from the door—and, for the rest, kept her upon an artistic treadmill. Her external history, therefore, as well after the concert as before it, was far from being eventful.

Not eventful, indeed, but something very much more, in more ways than one. For with whatever justice Mark Warden might repeat to himself, over and over again, "If it were not for Marie," Marie had at least an equal reason for saying—had it ever occurred to her to say it—"If it were not for Mark!"

The greatest event of all had happened to her, in which all smaller events were merged. In a word, she had done what it is not given to one in ten thousand to do—she had found out her own true line in life; and it was, unfortunately, not only essentially different from, but antipathetic to, that which should have been hers as the wife of Mark Warden, or, indeed, as the wife of almost any man. To her own intense astonishment it was she, and not her divine cousin, who had turned out to be the swan of the family, and to be confessed as such by other

swans. It was not long—thanks partly, no doubt, to the exertions of her patron and tyrant, which went far to counteract the effects of her own modesty and want of self-confidence, but assuredly also in great measure to her own natural genius, which in all lines of art, but most especially in hers, so often and so wonderfully outdoes the effects of the most complete training—before her name was familiar to almost every one in London except her own husband, who was one of those to whom the very highest artistic reputation is meaningless and incomprehensible. He was one of that immense body of often really sensible people who can never be made to regard art as a serious pursuit—on a level in point of seriousness, to say the least of it, with law and trade; who think of it as a means of mere amusement both to the artist and to his audience, and to whom the difference between a Bach and a grinder of barrel-organs is not so much even as a difference of degree. Under almost any other circumstances his wife, in her ignorance of her own nature, would have been quite content practically to have acted upon this view. Hitherto she had looked upon human sympathy as not only the chief but the only need of her soul; but now she had learned, without having followed the process, that her soul had need of a higher sympathy than one that was merely human and personal, and nothing more. Far different in this respect was she from Felix. He, as it were, had started as an enthusiast and full-blown genius; and all that he had seen and learned had, as has been seen, tended to disgust him. He had expected to find the lives of those who had devoted themselves to art as fair and as beautiful as art itself; and he felt, in consequence, something like the novice in Gustave Dore's picture when he finds himself for the first time surrounded by the gross incarnate torpor in the midst of which he must henceforth waste his enthusiasm and devotion, and to which he must conform unless he chose to seek refuge in the madness of vain revolt. But she, to whom the artist life was an altogether unknown garden, assimilated, like the bee in the fable, all that was pure and good in it, and left all its poison unnoticed and unknown. When she found herself treated unjustly—and she had far too much merit not to meet with frequent injustice—she set the cause down to her own shortcomings, and exerted herself all the more to remove the cause. When she was overpraised—and she had far too many faults to deserve all the praise bestowed upon her—she set it down to the kindness of her friends and the generosity of the world, and exerted herself all the more in order that her friends and the world might not bestow their kindness and generosity where either was undeserved. Indeed the critics, whether they blamed or whether they praised, disturbed her mind very little indeed. She was following her art neither for fame nor for wealth, but simply for itself; and indeed she would, in her own way, have continued to follow it, as she had always done, without saying a word about it to any body, even had chance never thrown her in the way of Monsieur Prosper or any one else. But in that case she certainly would never have followed it in public; and almost the only reason for which she did so now was, that she thereby might, so far as she could, relieve her

husband from the burdensome duty of helping her to live.

Genius is by no means invariably united with a thirst for fame. Indeed it is by no means certain that such is the case even usually. Fame is always welcome when it comes, of course; but the true spur and aim of genius, in any sense of the word, is its own self-sufficing energy.

Thus it happened that, while Marie knew nothing of her husband's life, he understood less than nothing of hers. He did not even attempt to hide from himself that he regretted the error of his boyhood most bitterly; nor was he deep-sighted enough to see what a prize he had drawn in the great marriage-lottery, as considered even from a paying and practical point of view. As for her, she was still looking forward to doing her duty as a good wife, and was eager to find herself in a position to do it. But even in her case it must be allowed that the bud of her romance had withered without ever having developed into its natural blossom.

She was indeed in a false position altogether. Honest as the day, she was living a lie; and not only so, but acquiescing in it, as though her conduct were the most right in the world. She was a wife, and yet holding a relation to her husband that was less than that of a mistress; less than if she were separated in fact or divorced in law. They had not even a thought, not even a wish, in common; and what she had become was brought about by far other hands than those of her husband. He was the same Mark Warden still, in all essential matters; but, even in essential matters, she was no longer the same Marie.

And yet, though essentially different, she was still the same—if such a self-contradictory expression is intelligible. In ways, and thoughts, and feelings, and views of life, the celebrated artist must needs differ widely from the obscure country girl; but in other things, happily—in the goodness that is the gift of nature and not of experience—no mental development need work a change. By knowledge, the best sort of purity is only made purer still; and of this best sort was hers.

Of course, among numerous other acquaintances of her own profession, she came to see a good deal of Felix; with whom, to tell the truth, she was considerably disappointed when she saw him for the first time. In her fancy she had always pictured him as being in style and in appearance a kind of romance hero; and her idea of a romance hero had by no means been the same as that of her cousin. But it is due to Felix to say that her disappointment was soon over. With many weaknesses on both sides, each had strength of nature enough, and more than enough points of sympathy, to make real friendship between them possible; and those aspects of character which were weak in the one, were precisely those which were strong in the other. Accordingly, this friendship of theirs was of incalculable benefit to both.

Now, to allude to a rather delicate and much-disputed topic, it may be very true that friendship, in the true sense of a word which expresses the highest of all human relations, does not often come to exist between a man and a woman unless the age of one or both is such as to render the intrusion of passion unlikely; and not very often then. But such age is not nec-

essarily old age. The youth that belongs to the artist nature and not to fewness of years has this privilege, at least, that it is capable of experiencing and comprehending the effect of sentiment which not only is not born of passion, but does not even necessarily result in it—of that order of sentiment which is mere foolishness and a stumbling-block to men who pique themselves upon knowing the world, and upon calling things by their right names. The truth is, that the artist nature is always rather sentimental than passionate. He whose nature leads him to make a conscious or unconscious study of emotion for purposes of reproduction can not be so completely under the influence of the passions and sentiments that he himself undergoes, as the man who simply feels and suffers, and never attempts to analyze. The great high-priest of Art, never forgetting the beat of the measure of his hexameters even in the very embrace of his mistress, is only a type of illustrations that might be multiplied by thousands. It is certainly not that the lives of artists are more pure than those of other men and women; but it is that their souls have lived in the expression and imagination of passion rather than in passion itself. With the ordinary man, passion is its own aim; with the artist, it is but a means to produce sentiment; and if sentiment can be produced without the aid of passion, there is no reason why passion need have any thing to do with the matter.

In other words, the swine will revel in the mud for the mud's sake, without reference to the pearls that may have been cast therein; the higher nature will cast itself into the mud also, but it will be in order to rout out the pearls; and if the pearls are thrown upon a clean place, will not care for the mud at all.

This may seem to be rather a transcendental way of regarding a fiddler and a music-mistress who came to know each other intimately, and did not happen to fall in love. Nevertheless, it is not to be taken in the light of a digression.

Marie had until now lived a life as hidden from herself as it had been from others. It was as though she had been asleep in the enchanted forest. Her soul had indeed been none the less that of the artist, but it had not as yet eaten of the tree of knowledge. To speak more prosaically, she had not the least idea that she differed in any way from other girls of her own age, except that she was rather more stupid and very much more shy; though, in reality, she could not have proved that she possessed something of the higher nature more than by being content to be what she was, and by doing what she could to develop what she had. But now that she had found admittance into a region the inhabitants of which were openly and consciously interested in all that had always unconsciously interested her, and who accepted her thoughts and ways as if they placed her above instead of below the crowd, she felt, if not like the sleeping princess when the prince arrived at the end of the hundred years of slumber, yet at all events like the supposed duckling when it first found itself with its own kind. Here it was that the sympathy of Felix made itself useful, by teaching her the spirit of the language of her new world, and by making her feel her own strength, which was now developing itself rapidly and surely.

But if he gave much, he received very much more than he gave; not that his was by any means the lower nature in all respects, but it certainly was in some. Friendship can not exist where the superiority is all on one side; and that, certain women-scorers may be tempted to say, may be the reason why friendship between men and women is, to say the least of it, so rare; while on the other hand, there are others who might account for the same fact on a similar but opposite ground. Thus, like many young artists—and like some old ones too, for that matter—he was too much inclined to the charlatanism of playing the genius, of railing at social rules, and of glorifying the land of Bohemia, not as a region where it is right that the apprentice of art should pass some of his *Wander-Jahre*, his years of travel, but as a home to be lived in and loved for its own sake. But, after the manner of his kind, he was intensely capable of taking the impress of others' natures without in the least degree losing the original mould of his own; and however much sympathy Marie came to have with the man himself, she had no sympathy with vanity, or with any of its external symptoms. Charlatanism of every kind was bound to feel itself ridiculous before her harmonious directness of thought and speech; and she could not see that it is better in itself to be poor than to be rich, better to be at war than to be at peace, better to make the worst than the best of things. Her own road might have to lie through Bohemia; but she had her own Stratford, her own Dayslesford, beyond its borders.

Nor was it only by her directness of nature and by her good sense that she did him good. He was alone in the world, and had always been so; and though he had often found kindness and good comradeship, this kind of sympathy was something altogether new to him. Every one needs sometimes to talk freely and sincerely about himself to somebody; every one needs sometimes to make confession, and no one is fit to be his own confessor. Felix was no exception to the rule. On the contrary, free speech was indeed to him the mind's morning, that

"Spreads the beauteous images abroad,
Which else lie furled and clouded in the soul."

He was filled with dreams and fancies to overflowing, which, had he not met with her, would have been in a fair way to become corrupt and morbid.

But it must not for a moment be supposed that he in the least degree thus escaped from the tyranny of his *grande passion*. Temperaments like his are invariably far more influenced by the cruelty than by the kindness of a mistress; nor, ridiculous as such a disposition may appear to modern notions, is it by any means a sign of weakness, except so far as one may apply the word weakness to generosity, unselfishness, faith, loyalty, and other kindred qualities. Accordingly, in this matter there was some reticence between them. But still they did speak of it, and of her who had been and was still the heroine of the life-story of which Marie now became the first and only confidante.

Nor must it be supposed either that Felix took the, to him, inexplicable breach between himself and Angélique by any means calmly. Friendship is no substitute for passion. Nor could Marie help seeing how things were going; and

though it was impossible for her to accept the fact that Angélique could by any possibility do wrong, the state of things made her very unhappy indeed. At last the day came when all was over; when her cousin threw herself into her arms and told her that she was now Mrs. Lester. What Marie answered was inaudible through tears, partly of sympathy, partly of sorrow. But she did insist upon one thing—that Felix should be told at once how matters stood; and she was brave enough to undertake herself to be his informant.

So one day she sent for him suddenly, and as gently and kindly as she could—that is to say with all possible gentleness and kindness—told him the news. The pill that he had to swallow was bitter, but he could not complain of any want of tenderness on the part of his physician.

Then she went on to make excuses for Angélique.

"Yes," she said, "it would have been best if she could have told you at once that she had mistaken her heart. But then you must remember how young she was—what a girl she is still. If you only knew how difficult it often is for any girl to know her own heart—"

"Oh, you need not be afraid," he answered, with false composure; "I am not going to complain of her. What you say is doubtless all most true."

But his false composure did not deceive her.

"If you only knew how distressed she herself is; how anxious she is that you should not think harshly of her; how she hopes for your happiness—"

"Marie," he said, in a firm voice, "if she is happy, that ought to be enough for me, and shall be. Tell her—no, you need tell her nothing; what is there to tell?"

"I wish she could have loved you," said Marie at last, after a long pause.

"Well—now I suppose I am married to Art in earnest," he answered, with a shade of bitterness.

"We are all of us young yet," she replied, with the air of earnest gravity which sometimes gave her face such an almost ludicrous sort of piquancy. "And you have all the world before you. After all, there is no woman—no, none—who is worth a man's career."

It was curious that Marie should have used almost the very words of a man like Monsieur Prosper. But then her meaning was not quite the same.

Certainly the words that had been spoken between them had been cold enough. When two persons are very strongly moved, their words are always cold; and very often their manner also. But the words and manner of Felix did not deceive Marie in the least degree. She knew only too well what their coldness meant—how the reaction would come when her presence no longer acted as a restraint upon him. Far from being afraid of a scene, she would have been only too glad if he had set his whole heart free before her.

But he took her hand and thanked her instinctively with his eyes; for what, he knew not.

It is all very well, however, to enjoy the sympathy of an amiable woman from whom one is only too well disposed to receive it; but to receive the commiseration of a man, however kind-

ly meant, is in such cases by no means so pleasant. As he was leaving the house of Marie he was caught hold of in the street by Monsieur Prosper, among whose virtues delicacy was certainly not included.

There can be nothing more miserable than, with a heart swollen almost to bursting, with an aching breast, throbbing brain, and sightless eyes, suddenly to meet in the public streets one with whom we are bound to speak as though nothing had happened of more consequence than a change in the weather. But it is still worse than this when our acquaintance happens to be one who, out of a sort of half-perverse, half-kindly instinct, insists, as a matter of course, upon plunging at once into the very subject which better tact would have taught him to avoid. We then have to smile ten times as much as there is any need; to talk ten times as lightly; to let him say what he will, even though at every word he tramples upon a thousand corns. And the worst of it is, that when under such circumstances as those of Felix we are striving to bury our heads in the sand, we are certain to be caught hold of by our own particular Monsieur Prosper.

"So it seems that my fair pupil has run away with a duke, or a marquis—which is it? Well, so much the better for you. I know something of the women, *ma foi!* and congratulate you from my soul. If you had married that girl, you would have been frittered away in no time. Bah! my dear fellow, I am only speaking the truth. I grant you she is charming—unmarried. Now her cousin—there would be an artist's companion for you, if she were not an artist herself. She would work by a man's side, even if she didn't lead the way; and an attic or palace—all would be the same to her. I only hope to heaven she will never marry, though! A wife may be a good artist, but as soon as she becomes a mother it is all over with her. Bah! it's lucky for this Angélique of yours that her duke or marquis, or whoever he is, is a rich man, or I shouldn't envy him his bargain."

If Felix had not broken down before Marie, it was not likely that he would do so before Monsieur Prosper.

"He is neither duke nor marquis," he said; "and I hear that he has given up every thing for her sake."

"Don't you believe such nonsense. No, my boy—a man will give up much for a woman, but not every thing. I dare say, if the truth were known, Antony found it quite worth his while to lose the world just for the sake, not of keeping Cleopatra, but of getting rid of Octavia. What are you going to do now? Will you come and dine?" A dinner seemed to be his panacea for all the ills of the world.

"I am engaged."

"Engaged? that's just what I thought you were no longer! Oh, here's Barton—why, every body seems about to-day."

So indeed it seemed to Felix, at all events.

"Ah! Créville," said Barton, "we haven't met for an age. Why, what's up? You look as if your liquor hadn't agreed with you last night. Is it true, Prosper, that that Miss Marchmont, that came out in your 'Faith's Reward,' you know, is married to ten thousand a year? I shouldn't think it was on the strength of my

notice of her in the 'Trumpet.' She was a pretty girl, though. By-the-way, what's her real name?"

"She was a Miss Lefort."

"By Jove! and her Christian name?"

"Angélique."

Barton burst into one of his explosions of laughter, which made Prosper stare curiously and Felix angrily.

"I half guessed as much," he went on between his bursts of laughter.

"Pray, may I ask why?" asked Felix, rather sternly.

Barton, struck by something in his tone, glanced at him, and then whistled.

"Oh, never mind," he said. "I say, Prosper, what are you going to do? And you too, Créville?"

"I must go home now," said Felix, turning to Prosper; and he walked off without further ceremony.

"A rival?" asked Barton.

Prosper shrugged his shoulders.

"Poor boy!" he said to himself.

"By-the-way, is there any other Miss Lefort?"

"*Nom!* I should think so!"

"And is her name Marie?"

"What—do you know her?"

"Not in the least. But we have a mutual friend, I fancy. By Jove! it would be a good joke. Tell me about her."

"Willingly; and as Felix won't dine with me, perhaps you will?"

"More than willingly, if I have not forgotten by this time how to dine at all."

As to Felix, he had long had a presentiment that his *grande passion* must eventually come to this; but the fulfillment of a presentiment is never the more easy to bear because it has been foreseen. And now that he reached home and could indulge in the luxury of solitude, the reaction feared by Marie fairly came; and before long he had reached one of those moods in which men of his impulsive and excitable temperament are as likely as not to do something desperate.

CHAPTER XVII.

AND so it came about that Hugh Lester found himself all of a sudden no longer a rich man and his own master, but a poor man, burdened with a wife and with the necessity of earning his own bread; and that Angélique, instead of having become the heiress of Earl's Dene, found herself the wife of one who, as far as appearances went, was much more likely to sink in the scale of society than to rise in it. She had better by far have thrown in her lot with Felix, after all, even as a matter of prudence. He, at all events, could not well sink lower than where he was, and was in a position to earn a crust, if nothing more.

To repeat her dramatic experiment was quite out of the question. Her *fiasco* had quite put her out of court; nor did Monsieur Prosper or any other dealer in talent think sufficiently well of her merit to care to exert himself to recover her position for her. Besides, Hugh, with his social theories, would have starved, and would

almost have let her starve, rather than have permitted her, now that she was his wife, to remain on, or to return to, the stage; and this even though she had been possessed of the power of a Siddons or a Pasta. The duty of supporting her was now, he considered, his entirely; and not only must he support her, but in a way that should be entirely free from doubt or suspicion. No man can change his caste at will; and though in the eyes of the world he was no longer Mr. Lester of Earl's Dene, still he was by no means one to think that he had, with the advantages of his old position, given up its duties also. And then he was no doubt influenced by an unwillingness, that would be common to most men under similar circumstances, to leave a young and beautiful bride among the associations of the green-room.

Perhaps, however, he would not have felt quite so scrupulous upon this point had he been less filled with hope and courage than he was. He was not conscious, in his altered circumstances, of any diminution of strength, or, as yet—though the consciousness of this would have to come very speedily—of any want of ready money; and though bitterly grieved that his aunt had thrown him over so utterly, so suddenly, and, above all, apparently so unkindly—thanks to Angélique's cleverness in confiscating his letter—he was proud of having been able to prove his love by engaging in that war with the world which to lookers-on appears so romantic and heroic, but which to those who are actually engaged in it is so inexpressibly prosaic and sordid and mean. He had done what lovers are for the most part contented with expressing their willingness to do—he had renounced all for the sake of her whom he loved.

It is easy and pleasant enough to imagine one's self continually inspired by some lofty aim or motive, with a front always kept straight to the foe, and a heart always firm and serene and of good cheer, fighting one's way bravely through the world, drawing true friends to one's side, and before long prevailing by dint of sheer strength and honor. Just so may a boy, whose imagination is fascinated by the idea of the career of arms, picture war to himself as a glorious succession of forlorn hopes and desperate charges. But let the modern Don Quixote, putting his theory into practice, actually give up his peace and comfort, and plunge into the grotesque medley of hopeless and heart-sickening delays, of lingering wounds, of blundering, of treachery, and of cowardice, that make up the greater portion of the world's war, and he will be more than fortunate if in a very short time his high aim does not become directed to getting the upper-hand in a bargain, if experience does not teach him that to keep his front to the foe is to court death and not victory, and if he does not learn that the crowding of friends to his side is the consequence of success, and never its cause.

But all this Hugh had yet to learn. He was really strong enough to do with ease many things from which brave men shrink. To proclaim his altered fortunes, and to give up his former society before his former society gave up him, was as easy and almost as inspiring as a flourish of trumpets accompanying a declaration of war; and it was with a positive eagerness that he hastened to throw over all his engagements, to mortify his tailor by paying him, and to astonish

the most exclusive club in London by removing his name from the list of its members. So far it was upon Angélique, who had brought about the situation, that it bore most heavily.

At first her anger and disappointment were extreme. She had done worse than lose the trick—she had been cheated; nor did it occur to her that she had been cheated just because her own game had not been open and straightforward. Fortunate was it for Hugh that the marriage was not of long standing, or doubtless the storm would have fallen upon his own head; and as things were, it was not that she was too much in love with him to make him her scapegoat, but that she could not help feeling some gratitude to him for his sacrifice of the world for her sake, and for his vain attempt to save her from sacrificing herself for his; and the circumstance was too recent to have fallen even from so short a memory as hers. And so it was for Warden alone that she kept the storm that was brewing within her. After all, when she came to consider the matter, the game was not wholly lost. Miss Clare might yet be reconciled, or might die without a will—in fact, the chapter of accidents contained a hundred chances in her favor, though those against her might be a thousand. Soon she found herself saying, instead of "Suppose I were Mrs. Lester of Earl's Dene," "*I will be Mrs. Lester of Earl's Dene—and let Mark Warden look well to his cards!*"

In short, it was to be a duel *à la mort* between them for the prize of Earl's Dene, and both parties had their advantages. Mark Warden was so far the victor; but then he had no fear of his opponent, and was likely to play blind.

This determination of hers made her also resolve to remain good friends with her husband. If he was no longer to be her high-road to fortune, it was still he who must provide the material and the instruments for making it; and meanwhile she must manage to play the part of the good wife as best she might. That he was as happy with her as he tried to persuade himself he was, can scarcely be said with truth after the flight of the first few weeks of triumph; but he found no tangible reason to complain. Indeed it is the way of such as he not only to make the best of a bad bargain, but to persuade themselves into the belief that it is a good one.

Nevertheless, symptoms of its having turned out not the best of all possible bargains began very soon to show themselves. With the best will in the world to appear good-tempered, she could not altogether, with perfect success, contrive to seem what she was not; and she was too genuinely disappointed not sometimes, out of the fullness of her heart, to give expression to her disappointment. It was inconceivably bitter to her to have to bear small troubles and annoyances, such as having to economize in clothes, to haggle with small tradesmen about ounces and half-pence—a matter, by-the-way, in which her disgust did not prevent her proving herself a most admirable woman of business—and to find no admiration save on the part of her husband and from the chance passengers of the streets. Hugh, too, often bored her terribly; and she could not help sometimes showing that he bored her by yawning in his face, both literally and metaphorically. He, in his good-nature, used to set down her little crop of shortcomings to the ac-

count of his own selfishness. He tried to make up to her in every possible way for what he had made her lose, and never dreamed of laying his failure at her door.

As for a reconciliation with his aunt, he had given up all idea of that as entirely out of the question; and, too wise to cry over spilled milk, made up his mind not to dream of the impossible, but to turn himself to whatever work might lie next his hands.

This, again, was all very well; but it was by no means so well when he came to ask himself for what he was fit, and what he could do. The question was infinitely more easy than the answer. He had no profession, and had been brought up to none: he knew nothing but the "*As in presenti*" and the "*Propria quæ maribus*," which it had taken him some fifteen years to learn: he could do nothing but hunt and shoot and fish, and in general follow all such pursuits as cost a great deal of money, but bring in none—unless, indeed, he turned game-keeper or huntsman; and even then he would lack the professional apprenticeship that in every pursuit distinguishes the artist from the amateur.

Nor were such influential persons as he had in his prosperous days numbered among his acquaintance particularly willing to help him now. In the book of the world of patronage he had written himself down far too great an ass to be within the pale of legitimate help. His vote and influence were lost to his party forever; and lost, moreover, through his own fault. Besides, he was as yet too proud to be a beggar, as, indeed, every gentleman ought to be until necessity, as necessity usually ends in doing, has thickened his skin very considerably.

But though, to reverse the condition of the unjust steward, he could not beg, to dig he was not ashamed; and he would have dug with pleasure had there been any room in England for an unpractised spade. And so it was before long borne in upon him that he had better wash his hands of the soil of England altogether, and go somewhere where digging may be had for the asking.

This caused the first open dispute—it did not amount to a quarrel—between himself and his bride. What! should she, a lady and the wife of a gentleman, give up the battle at once before it was lost, and go and bury herself alive in the backwoods among bears both quadruped and biped? should she spend her hours and days and years in cooking and scrubbing, and washing and mending, and bringing up a rough race of colonial farmers and their wives? No; it was certainly not for that that she had become the wife of Hugh Lester. If she also had made a bad bargain, she would try to make the best of it—but by improving it, and by expending upon it time and trouble; not by sitting down and putting up with it. She was not made beautiful to blush unseen, nor clever and endowed with aristocratic tastes to waste her tastes and talents in a wigwam. The life of an "extralady"—in the theatrical sense—would be better than that. And so she managed to make herself so infinitely disagreeable whenever Hugh even alluded to the subject of emigrating, that he very soon had to allude to it no more. She said but little, indeed, and what she did say was always strictly and becomingly submissive; but she submitted

like a martyr; and such submission on the part of a woman to the man who is in love with her is simply irresistible, as most women well know. Griseldas will always win in the long run, and, generally speaking, in the short run also.

There is no need here to tell in all its details the whole story of Hugh Lester's troubles: how he spent his days in wandering about the streets, and his evenings in discussing with his wife plans with which she had no sympathy, and in which she consequently took no interest. Could he, in the course of his wanderings, have hit upon a plan for getting unmarried, well and good; but, as things were, she was too much occupied with her own more important schemes to care much about his. She was by no means so proud in her difficulties as he. Unknown to him she wrote to Alice Raymond, describing the position of herself and her husband; and with such good effect that the young lady made a resolute attempt to act the part of peacemaker between Miss Clare and Hugh. It need not be said that her well-meant attempt met with no success whatever; that, indeed, it made matters rather worse than before. Then Angélique tried to persuade Hugh himself to go down upon his knees to his aunt; but great as her influence over him was, especially when she chose to exert it actively, in this he was firm. All that he had to say he had already said in that letter whose fate was known to Angélique alone. And then, at last, in spite of her courage and confidence in her own skill, she could not but own that the battle seemed going dead against her.

But she did not know how heavily her enemy was weighted. Member of Parliament, indeed, he had a fair prospect of becoming, and a prospect of becoming in due course of time eminent at the bar that was scarcely less fair. But to become master of Earl's Dene, of the real prize of the war, it was necessary for him first to become the master of Alice Raymond.

Of course that was quite out of the question. But still it must be confessed that he used to see a great deal more of her than was at all necessary, unless he really meant work. He was, in fact, so much in love with Earl's Dene, not to speak of New Court, that he was every day more and more in love with the lady in whom their charms were incarnate; or at least fancied himself so, which, in such matters, means much the same thing. He used to hang about her, to feel jealous of her other he-acquaintance, and to let her see plainly that he cared more about her than about all the rest of the world put together. To what end, it may well be asked, when it could not by any possibility lead to any thing? Well, men are in such cases—that is to say, where gold and women are concerned—guided mainly by impulse; and practical wisdom, such as Warden's, is apt to think mainly of the means, knowing well how often they bring about their own end.

And what did Alice Raymond think? She was not a girl to fall easily over head and ears in love with any body, and certainly not until she was asked to do so; and yet she did not act as though she were altogether unwilling that the question should come. She had, for a woman, most marvellously little pride of family or of station, in this resembling her mother, whom she bade fair to resemble in many other things. She

had no need to marry for wealth, and if she chose to marry the son of a country surgeon, she had no one but herself to please. She believed in brains, and this surgeon's son seemed to her to have more brains than all the rest of her acquaintance put together—as, indeed, very likely he had. Still she had not thought about the matter to any very alarming degree. She would not be surprised at his having the presumption to ask her to marry him, nor would she consider it a presumption; but she had not by any means taken the precaution beforehand of making up her mind whether she should say yes or no. This is as much as to say that she had given him a good deal of hope—more, perhaps, than she consciously intended, but not more than she was willing that he should have, for he stood more than high enough in her good graces to make her feel flattered by his attention to her.

It could not but result from this that the idea of becoming great and rich at one *coup* came to exercise greater and greater fascination over the mind of Warden day by day and almost hour by hour; and none the less because the idea was apparently so eminently unpractical. When a practical man like himself does manage to get an unpractical notion into his head, and when he believes himself to be incapable of entertaining any but practical notions, he is fortunate if it does not run away with him into the region of monomania. Certainly the legitimate road to fortune seemed in his eyes to be desperately slow, now that he had obtained a vision of what is contained in those words of despair, "Might have been." He, like Angélique, was not content to sit down quietly and make the best of what he chose to consider his bad bargain. He had by this time fairly got past the stage of "If it were not for Marie;" from which to "How can I possibly get rid of Marie?" is only a single step, and scarcely so much as that. How he cursed the law that had made him thus suffer for his boyish impulse! But, easy as it had hitherto been to conceal it, it was impossible for him to deny his marriage, which he had taken care should be only too valid. It had been nothing more than a ceremony, it is true; and, in reality, he and Marie were no more husband and wife than they were in the eyes of the world. There were no children to insist upon their rights of legitimacy in time to come; and he felt the burden of no duties of use or affection. If, for the sake of the good things that surrounded and were represented by her, he fancied that he loved Alice Raymond, he in the same way and by the same process was rapidly coming, without any fancy in the matter, to detest Marie as the one obstacle to his obtaining that for which his whole soul hungered. What earthly reason, he asked himself, was there why he should be willing to cleave to Marie in full sight of the rich prize that was passing within reach of his hands? She was not beautiful; she was stupid—so he thought, for the nature of her development was a sealed book to him; she had no sympathy with his aims—which was perfectly true; she was not his equal in any respect—which was most certainly true also; and, above all, she was quite incapable of being of the least use to him. He had never lived with her, and *had not* the least wish to do so; nor, he thought *with inconsistent anger*, did she show any very

eager or overpowering desire to live with him. Her very devotion to his interests and contented sacrifice of her own, and her willingness to submit to him in all things, had, as is often the case, succeeded rather in mortifying his vanity than in gratifying it, and he would probably have been far less indifferent to her had she given him more cause. He went near her, very seldom now; and, to tell the truth, his vanity would have been mortified even more had he been able to guess how little he had come to be missed by her. The welcome that he received from her on the occasions of his rare visits was to the full as honest and as affectionate as of old; but Marie had become by this time so accustomed to the peculiar relation that had now existed between herself and her husband for so many long years, while her new life and her new friendship gave her mind so much occupation, that she was by no means any longer condemned to spend her time after the manner of the lady of the Moated Grange. Besides, she still trusted him implicitly; and, while he was away, assumed that he was seeing the less of her now in order that he might put things in train for seeing the more of her hereafter. For the same purpose she too worked as hard as possible, in order that, when the time should come, she might earn the satisfaction of placing in his hands the fruit of her industry, and of her zeal to bring nearer the day when he could throw overboard that hateful fellowship, and make her his wife before the world.

Her very calmness and patience at last provoked him beyond measure. He forgot that they were the result of habits that he himself had made her acquire, and of hopes that he himself had bestowed. And then there is no doubt that she bored him dreadfully, and did not see that she bored him. She was interested in all that he was doing, in his legal studies, in his political ambition, not because she cared a single straw about either law or politics, or was in the least degree ambitious for herself, but simply because they occupied him; and she assumed, and surely not unwarrantably, that he would take an interest in her pursuits because they were hers. But what cared he to listen to all the musical shop and gossip which is so intensely interesting to those who care about music itself, but so unutterably tiresome and contemptible to those who do not? All shop is necessarily odious to those who do not themselves stand behind the counter, or at least care very much for some one who does stand there. But when one both despises the shop and hates the shopwoman, it is sickening indeed; and it offended this parvenu to think that his wife had to perform in public for her bread.

After all, is it not almost a truism that life is a perpetual attempt to grasp the good that is out of our reach, and to throw away the good that is within it? Whether it be true or not, as Warden once tried to persuade himself, that the mould of each man's fortune is in his own hands, it is at all events certain that a man has but to close his fingers upon his palm to secure possession of his best good. But like the knight who roamed all over the world to seek for the fairest flower in it, but did not find it until, outworn with the search, it met his eyes as he re-entered his own castle-yard, most men are so tremen-

dously far-sighted that they are blind to any thing that is less than a league distant from them; and Mark Warden was, as must by this time have fully appeared, more long-sighted even than most men. Earl's Dene, as it loomed upon him in the distance, was visible enough to him; but Marie looked to him like a mere speck of dust that had lighted upon him, and which it would be as well to brush off as quick as possible—or rather like a burr, as valueless as dust, and infinitely more disagreeable.

Had she been other than she was, his entire neglect of her would more than probably have brought about the very worst possible consequences. She was quite good-looking enough to be considered pretty, now that she had come into notice, and there were quite enough people about her to tell her so. It was certainly not his fault that the desire to be free did not become mutual. She had to live and go about entirely alone, looking for aid and counsel to any one rather than to him from whom aid and counsel were due. Being what she was even, such a state of things could not in any wise be safe, seeing that her professional father and guide was Monsieur Prosper, whose ideas as to the limits of propriety were not over-strict, to say the least of it. He would have been as much opposed to the idea of her spoiling herself, as he would consider it, by taking a husband, as he was to that of Felix taking a wife, or rather more so; for if a man who is an artist is, according to his theory, necessarily ruined by marriage, how much more must an artist who is a woman be ruined by it? But, short of marriage, and of any connection equivalent thereto, he certainly held that an artist, whether man or woman, should know by experience what is meant by passion as well as by sentiment; and Marie's extreme prudence of conduct, which, according to the light that was in him, he could only ascribe to coldness of nature, provoked him almost as much as her passive obedience provoked Warden. It nearly made him think that he must have been mistaken in her; and indeed he told her as much sometimes. But she never even approached to a comprehension of what he meant. She was certainly still very stupid indeed about some things, and seemed likely to continue so.

But Monsieur Prosper was not much of a believer in the virtue of any woman, much less in that of a woman who seemed to be a paragon; and the friendship between his *protégés* could for him have but one meaning. His supposition was favored by the manner in which Felix received his attempts to rally him upon his having, when every one else had failed, been able to play the part of Endymion to this immaculate and miraculous Diana. It was almost the cause of another temporary quarrel between this pair of ill-matched friends, and ought, no doubt, to have made Felix himself rather more careful and circumspect for the sake of Marie. But, after all, is the world, which spoils so many good things, not to leave at liberty at least one pleasant relation, and that the pleasantest of all? At least Felix, conscious as he was of meaning no harm, was not one to think that the voice of the world, as represented by that of Monsieur Prosper, had the smallest right to affect his conduct in this matter in the least degree; and so, even as he had act-

ively scorned his friend's advice in respect of Angélique, he passively disregarded it in respect of her cousin. Of course he ought to have remembered the fable of the frogs and the boys. Of course every body ought to do every thing that is exactly right and proper on all occasions. But who ever did apply a moral to his own case? And what man who is not a monster of rectitude would have the heart to dream of crushing the rare bud of friendship when it is developing into blossom before his eyes?

It need not be said that Warden, for his part, had far too much to think about on his own account to take much notice of the persons with whom his wife associated; or that, if he had taken notice of them, he would particularly have cared; or that, if he had cared, he would have considered that he had the least reason to be jealous of Felix Créville. But it did happen that one evening, by a planned accident—and the planning of such accidents was beginning to take up a great deal of his time, even to the extent of leading him astray from his law studies—he met Miss Raymond at a large party given at a very great house indeed; and that she, who never forgot her friends or neglected to ask after them, seeing that they might at any moment fall within reach of the help that she was always seeking to extend not only to them but to all the world, lost no time in introducing the subject, as was her way, much to Warden's dislike, whenever she happened to meet him.

"What a great personage Marie Lefort is becoming all at once!" she said. "I remember we all used to think her such a stupid child."

"Yes, she seems to be doing well," said Warden, coldly. "But I don't profess to know any thing about music, you know."

"I suppose you are always thinking about your horrid law. I wish you did care about music, though. I always want my friends to like what I do."

"Ah! Miss Raymond, if you would educate me, perhaps I might become a second Handel—who knows?" The choice of Handel for his illustration was not accidental; it was because it was the only name to which his knowledge of musical history allowed him to refer. He had once been at a performance of the "Messiah" in Redchester Cathedral, and had only been saved from being very much bored by employing his time in meditation upon a problem in conic sections.

"Oh, I am far too stupid. If you want educating I must refer you to Marie. How is it, by-the-way, she does not get married? She ought, ought she not? I was having quite a long talk about her only this morning. Was it not an honor? Monsieur Prosper came to ask me to let him dedicate something to me."

"He is not the only person, I fancy, who would like the honor of dedicating something to you—and not only music."

For a wrangler and college fellow the compliment was not amiss. She blushed ever so little, and accepted it without a remark. Warden's heart gave a little bound of pride, for he felt that she had cared to apply what he had said, and he remembered that "she who blushes and is silent says enough."

"It was what he said," she continued, "that made me think about Marie marrying."

"Indeed!"

"As you know her so well, did you ever happen to come across a rather striking-looking young man who once gave me a few lessons when I was in Paris? Créville, his name is. He seems to be a very great friend of hers—so Monsieur Prosper says—and is very clever and very respectable."

Was it possible, then, that Marie, the immaculate, could be carrying on a flirtation parallel with his own? His own conscience did not prick him in the least; there is no law against a married man's being as attentive as he likes to as many pretty girls as he pleases, nor against his leaving his wife to take care of herself, if she is so minded; but though he did not feel jealous, he certainly felt surprised.

"Créville?" he asked. "No, I never met him."

"Monsieur Prosper speaks very highly of him indeed, and evidently thinks him *épris*. I can not bear to think of that poor girl going through all she does all alone; and I should be so glad if she could marry well in her own class."

There was certainly not much in these few and commonplace words, but where the soil is fertile and well prepared a very little seed will go a long way; and, slight as they were, they were so far destined to bear fruit, as to give him, or rather to suggest to him, a possible way out of his difficulties.

After all, what could it signify to the world or to themselves if he and Marie should agree to be henceforth to each other as though nothing had ever taken place between them? Such an arrangement, could it be carried out, would interfere with no rights of any other persons, and it would leave each of the two parties to it free to follow whatever course he and she might severally prefer. If it were true—and why should it not be true?—that Marie had found a lover, she would be only too willing to fall in with the idea; and if she had already cast off the yoke in part, she could not fairly object to his casting it off altogether. Perhaps he might even be able to persuade her that they were not really married at all, seeing that they had never lived together, and that the ceremony between them had been more or less clandestine. Any way, she would in no wise suffer; and if Monsieur Prosper, according to Miss Raymond, was right, she, judging her by himself, would be only too happy to grasp at the idea, so as to be free to indulge her own inclination. At all events, something must be done; and it was absolutely necessary to get himself fairly free of the old love, if in any possible way it could be managed, before he made any further attempt to advance himself in the good graces of the new. Even if he should fail in his great *coup*, it would be something to have cast off his burden; for no man of mature years ever longed to be able to get clear of a miserable and discreditable connection in which boyish folly had inextricably bound him, more than Warden longed to get clear of one who would have made him the best and most suitable of wives, both in reality and in the eyes of the world.

Another reason led him to this resolve. He had tried his very hardest to quarrel with Barton; but the latter, who would never let any one quarrel with him unless he himself pleased, seemed to take a malicious sort of delight in persecuting him with his unwelcome society as much as

possible. It was the old story of Frankenstein over again. The truth is, that the unfortunate scholar had very few places left now where he could sit and get drunk *gratis*; for the good resolutions which he had been continually making when living with Felix vanished, as a matter of course, whenever temptation fell in his way. Now he was one of those men who can not even be thrust out by main force by any one whose strength is not that of Hercules; and in point of self-assertion, even Warden himself, who was in general fully competent to hold his own, was not a match for him. The latter might sport his oak as much as he pleased, and give any number of orders to the boy who opened his door for him that he was not at home; but against a man like Barton nothing short of a pistol-bullet is of the least service, and the skin of Barton himself appeared thick enough to withstand the passage even of a cannon-ball.

But this was not the worst. He had of late taken to chaff his unwilling and despairing host in a manner that was as disagreeable as it was mysterious. He was perpetually indulging in not very delicately-expressed hints about the manner of life popularly held to have been led by the monks of old time having descended to their collegiate successors, in anticipation of Tennyson's Princess—though not quite in such graceful language—and in speculations as to the result of the coexistence of Fellows and Fellowesses, both at the high table and elsewhere, and in other suggestions and allusions that made Warden more afraid than desirous of offending him. At last it was impossible for him to help suspecting that Barton somehow or other had got to know too much; and he knew perfectly well that the latter not only told any thing and every thing when in his cups to any body and every body, but would take a direct and positive pleasure in proving that the sober and steady Mark Warden was not only no better than other men, but had obtained and was holding his fellowship and his reputation upon false pretenses. When dealing with such a man the false conscience that comes of fear made him feel guilty in the matter of the *pasquinade*, mere commonplace election trick as it had been, and he had ever since been expecting some sort of retaliation. It was of course just as likely as not—perhaps more likely than not—that these hints on Barton's part were the mere loose and random talk of a man who never much regarded what he said, and that their real applicability was the result of a mere coincidence; but, whether moved by conscience or not, Warden felt that he could not safely rely even upon the probability, far less upon the possibility, of the truth of such a view for the consolation of feeling secure. It puzzled him considerably to account for the existence of such a suspicion on the part of Barton; just as it would have puzzled him to account for its existence on the part of any one else; but it was certainly not rendered the less alarming for its being unaccountable. To fall into the power of such a man would be a terrible thing indeed; and this thought made it all the more incumbent upon him to rid himself of his burr at any price, and almost anyhow. The instinct of self-preservation had come to the support of the instinct of self-interest. Fear and hope were both drawing him in one and the same direction, and so strongly, and to such good purpose as to leave him al-

most as few scruples as they had left to the man who had strangled his wife at Gorsley. Had he been capable of self-analysis, he would now have known perfectly well why that story had made so unaccountable an impression upon him. It is not that he was likely to go to work in so clumsy a way; but it is quite possible to strangle without hands, and to effect one's purpose with weapons that slay and leave no sign.

Of course he did not know it; but he felt very much like the brigand who, on suddenly, at a turn of the road, coming upon a gallows upon which swung the body of one of his band, instead of taking warning from the sight, merely shrugged his shoulders, heaved a passing sigh, and murmured with contemptuous compassion, "*maladroit!*"

CHAPTER XVIII.

I HAVE never at any time, although I certainly once thought so, really belonged to the ranks of those who take up the line of despising and looking down upon the whole sex of womankind. I have gone through the whole process of railing at women, I must confess; but most men do that more or less when they are too young to know any thing about the matter, and seldom continue to do so when they have once had the good fortune to discover that good women do exist outside the circle of their own homes. Whenever I hear a man past thirty continuing to talk of women in general like a boy of twenty, I always set him down either for an affected blockhead, or for an unfortunate fellow who has seen only the very worst side of the world, if he has seen any side of it at all; or else for a human hog who is unable to distinguish between pearls and acorns, and so tramples both indiscriminately under foot. But certainly once in my life it was my fate to feel, in all honesty and sincerity, a disgust for the whole feminine portion of the world, represented as it was to me by her whom I had followed from Paris, and to whose service I had devoted myself, but who now as utterly threw me aside as if I had never been so much to her as a lackey would have been, as soon as love came to her in the guise in which Zeus came to Danaë. Indeed, to what cause was it possible to ascribe her conduct but to the most contemptible of all? Mr. Lester might certainly be the very paragon of all that was noble and attractive: of this I knew nothing. But he was certainly as rich as I was poor; and this I did know. My grand passion had come to a most untimely and unromantic end, and the prophecy of my Mephistophelean Mentor seemed likely to be fulfilled to the very letter.

Throughout my conversation with Marie, I believe that I succeeded in keeping myself tolerably calm. But when I left her I felt as though I were drunk with wine; I scarcely saw where I was going; I had no control over my voice—no command over my steps. I have a dim recollection of meeting both Prosper and Barton on my way, but of what I said to them or they to me, I have no recollection whatever. They certainly must have thought me drunk. No doubt all this sounds sufficiently ridiculous; and, no doubt, I ought by rights to have been well prepared for what I had just heard. My dismissal, practical-

ly, had taken place weeks ago—perhaps more. But when a gambler has staked his whole fortune upon the cast of a single die, he must be excused for losing his senses a little when he has lost the throw. "*Semel insanivimus omnes;*" and we are not to be blamed for that, but for being mad more than *semel*.

Poor Dick Barton was no longer living with me. We had not quarrelled—far from it; for I believe that he, for some strange reason or other, bore me a real affection; and I too—why, it is quite impossible to say—know that I bore one for him. Poverty, at all events, has this one merit, that it teaches us to know the good and ill of each other marvellously soon, and to love the one and not to judge harshly of the other, whatever it may be; at least such has been my own experience. Besides, I will say for Barton that he never showed any but his good side where I was concerned. I was certainly very far, indeed, from being able to appreciate his learning and special kind of talent, or to admire his manner of using the one or the other; but there was at the bottom of the man's character so much true goodness of nature, and such a perfect scorn of every thing that was mean and base, from which he did not exempt his own many faults and weaknesses, and he was so completely open and unreserved in thought and speech—better had it been for himself had he been otherwise—that I could not but accept him for what he might have been, rather than for what he actually was. But why am I so ungrateful as to attempt to make mere excuses for him? I care not what others may say or think. I am quite willing to admit that he had the errors and weaknesses of other men multiplied by a thousand; but, for myself, I have too much cause not to think of him with something more than ordinary affection, and to judge him by a higher standard than the judgment of men. "I was sick, and ye visited me: verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

The bitterness of my disappointment, coming as it did upon the hard and uncongenial work, the mental anxiety, the want of bodily nourishment, and all the various wretchedness, unlightened by hope or buoyancy of heart, which had been my portion for so long, had its natural effect upon me. I was nervous and excitable at the best of times. I was much given to brooding over myself, and a life of which music is the centre is not one to render any man's nature more calm. One of three things was inevitable. There are some men who in my position would have committed murder; there are many who would have committed suicide. I take no credit to myself that I did neither; for before my thoughts had time to direct themselves into any decided channel, I found myself prostrate with brain fever.

Throughout its course, as I lay in my miserable garret, I was tended by Dick Barton; and I will undertake to say that the man has never lived—no, nor the woman either—who, under any circumstances, has proved a better and more self-denying nurse than he then proved to me. I know that I have never since been a thoroughly good believer in the necessary superiority of a woman over a man in a sick-room. There is a pathos in the tenderness of a rough hand, in the

gentleness of a loud voice, in the subdued sound of a heavy tread, in the conscious restraint of a self-indulgent nature, that is wanting to the naturally self-denying nature, to the velvet footfall, to the sweet voice, and to the soft hand, which are light and gentle and tender just because they can not help being so. There is something also that is bracing and tonic in the free sympathy of a comrade, while the ceaseless attention of a woman is always more or less enervating; and as real sickness makes women of us all, we, like them, feel the advantage of being supported by stronger hands than theirs. And then, too, one can swear at a man, and tell him plainly when he worries one: his dress does not rustle, he does not speak in whispers, and he understands that when one is ill one wants to be left alone as much as possible. All this is rank heresy, I know; but I am not ashamed to confess myself a heretic, if only for Dick Barton's sake.

How he contrived to support us both during this time, I never wholly knew; indeed, I afterwards took care not to make too minute inquiries. Prosper was generous to me—more, I think, than he would have been to most men where money was concerned; but any amount of generosity on his part would not have accounted for all, nor could we have lived entirely upon occasional loans of half-crowns. I certainly have dim recollections of seeing Barton, as he sat up with me night after night, writing at a furious pace, always with a pencil, in order that I might not be worried with the scratching of a pen; and I hope that that also may have accounted to some extent for our having escaped starvation. Nor do I believe that during these weeks of watching he ever lapsed into his usual habits—indeed I heard afterwards, from our landlady, that he had never returned from any of his expeditions from home otherwise than sober, and that nothing in the shape of liquor had once entered the house. It may seem but little to say in praise of a man's devotion to one's self that for a few weeks he managed to keep sober, and to work hard: but in his case it can be called nothing short of heroism. I doubt if, in the course of his whole life, he had ever before both worked hard and kept sober for two consecutive days. It was not till I was entirely out of danger that Dick Barton one evening brought in two bottles of brandy, drank them both in one short sitting, and then went off to sleep before the fire-place for twenty-four hours; and it was thus that I knew I was well.

How like a dream every thing now appeared! When I first woke again to my bare and empty world, it cost me all the effort of which, in my weak condition, I was capable, to comprehend where I was, and almost to comprehend who I was. It would have seemed most natural to me to find myself in my bed at Pré-aux-Fleurs, under the care of Aunt Cathon or Mère Suzanne; and for a moment I really thought so, for I had been delirious, and my brain was still confused. Nor, when I was once more able to realize all that had happened, did reality seem less unreal than fancy itself. It seemed to me that I had been dreaming all my days, and that my delirium had been only that confused portion of a dream that immediately precedes waking. With respect to my whole life, I had to make the same effort to recover my recollection that one makes

when endeavoring to recall some vanished vision of the night that has left an unusually vivid impression. I made the effort quite calmly, for I was left far too weak in body to suffer in mind. Strange to say, of all the images that rose before me, one by one, and that once more came back into being, the last was that of Angélique Lefort—or, as I should now say, of Angélique Lester. It seemed as if that which had been buried in my heart the most deeply of all, had taken the longest time to emerge from it into the upper light. But I am wrong. One image came later still, which came out of the darkness with all the modest gentleness of her whom it represented—as though, like herself, it had preferred to take the lowest room. But when at last it did come, every word, every touch which had passed between myself and her became a living thing, standing out from the shadow in strong relief—something real to hold by, something to believe in as true, if all the world should prove but a dream. If the sight of Dick Barton had proved to me that my illness was over, it was the thought of Marie that proved to me that I was still alive—that I had not passed wholly into the land of shadows forever. And not only so, but, direct my thoughts whithersoever I would, they still settled back upon the consoling words, and upon the voice that had spoken them, and upon the true eyes that had given them the force of life, and not upon the words of a love that must now be crushed at any cost, and from which some instinct seemed to make my memory recoil. It may be that the brain, in its strife to recover strength, threw off, by a healthy effort of nature, all that might hinder its success, and turned to what must needs render its recovery at once more rapid and more sure.

I was not allowed to talk much for some days, in the course of which I had ample time to gather myself together; and it was not long before I came to the conclusion that this tendency of my thoughts was not the result of recollection merely, but had been brought about in some measure also by an occasional presence that had mingled itself with the dreams of my fever. Barton would not talk to me upon this subject, however much I sought to question him; but I felt very certain that my very earthly nurse had been aided by an occasional angelic visitation.

My recovery was not slow; for I could not afford to be ill, far less to enjoy the luxury of a long and gradual convalescence, seeing that, before all things, I had to relieve Dick Barton from his burden as soon as I could possibly manage to do so. Still, even so, getting well was most certainly hard enough.

Almost as soon as I could contrive to crawl out of doors I paid a visit to Marie Lefort, and I thought her also looking ill and anxious. She had little news to tell me, except that Angélique, whom she had of late seen but seldom, was well, and, she hoped, happy, in spite of increasing difficulties; but she did not seem overwilling to speak of the subject. Of herself she had much more to say; and that subject was a far more pleasant one to both of us. She seemed at once, and apparently without an effort, to have made a really great success, in the best sense of the word—to have made the success that I had been supposed to be struggling for all my days, and that hundreds of far greater merit than mine are con-

stantly struggling for and seldom succeed in obtaining. All who remember the musical history of that day will also remember the name of Marie Lefort, while I do not flatter myself that one will call to mind that of Felix Créville. And yet, to pursue the comparison between us, on my side had been ambition, long and early familiarity with the profession and its ways, the most careful and elaborate training, and a natural aptitude for my art—which I do not confound with my profession; while she was most certainly devoid of the least particle of personal ambition—she had had no regular training, and had known nothing of her profession until she, almost from the very moment she appeared, had come to stand confessedly at its head.

Certainly the ways of genius are inscrutable, and in our own art—I no longer call it a profession where genius is in question—certainly not less inscrutable than they are in others. The praise and blame of critics may indeed kill mere merit, and often do kill it; but what is royal by right of nature they can not dethrone so long as it remains true to itself, for it is then proof alike against praise and blame. And this girl was as unconsciously true to herself as she was to all the world; and none the less so for being a true woman as well as a true artist, and for being no less good than true. I began by saying that I believe in good women; but I very much doubt if I should have been able to say so had I not met with her. It was as likely as not that after the destruction of my faith I should never have sought to change my opinion; and if a man seeks only for what is bad, he is tolerably sure to find what he seeks, and that only. I can not sufficiently rejoice that the good came to me without my seeking for it, as indeed is generally the case with good things of every kind. I also, like most men, have found out that the great instrument of Providence is accident; and am almost inclined to hold, by way of consequence, that the less we attempt to control accident the better for our good fortune.

It was from her that I learned fully of Barton's devotion to me; and she, with her faculty for seeing at a glance the best of every one, was as full of his praise as her story made me become. Moreover, she had found him—a thing incredible to all who knew any thing of the man—as considerate of her in every way as if she had been a queen and he one of her court. But for this I did not give him too much credit, for I did not then believe that there was a man living who, when with her, would not catch from her something of her own gentleness; and I do not believe it now, save in respect of one man out of all the world—and that man was certainly not Dick Barton.

While I was with her, there entered a gentleman to whom I was introduced as Mr. Warden, and whom I remembered to have seen at Miss Raymond's house on the evening when Angélique Lefort first appeared before an audience. I was sorry to have our talk interrupted, and, after a minute or two, left her: nor did she press me to stay. On my return to my lodging, which had again become Dick Barton's also, he gave me a scolding for having escaped from my confinement without leave, and added:

"But I suppose you have been to return thanks for kind inquiries." There were plenty

of them certainly in that quarter, if you care to know. I know if I were that damned, infernal, hypocritical humbug I should begin to be jealous; and I hope to hell he is. But the prig is sure to make his way in this paradise of prigs called the world; and it would pay an interesting sort of fellow like you to help to ease him of some of his plunder. Men like that always get rich, sooner or later. It is honest men like you and me that grow lean; but still—well, unlucky devil as I am, I'm glad I'm not even as this Pharisee."

"Who in the world are you talking of?"

"Who? Why, Mark Warden; *Cram Warden*—Mark read backward, you know—as he used to be called at Mag's in my time."

"Warden? I was introduced to a Mr. Warden this very morning by Miss Lefort."

"The devil you were! Do you mean to say you never met him there before?"

"Never."

"Nor heard of him?"

"No."

"Oh, that's her game, is it?"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Warden's getting tired of her—shouldn't wonder. If I were you, I'd just look out a little. You're just the fellow to go over head and ears. And it seems to be a family that has an uncommonly good notion of looking after itself. Young Lester wasn't a bad catch; and Warden won't prove himself much worse a one in the long-run, if she can hold him, unless I'm confoundedly mistaken. And if the worst should come to the worst with her, you see, she'll have two strings to her bow. You'll do to make an honest woman of her, if she wants to take to that line."

This was Monsieur Prosper over again, only a great deal worse.

"And of whom are you speaking now?"

"Why, of Miss Lefort and Warden's—which is rhyme and reason, and alliteration into the bargain. Ah! he thinks that because a man sleeps with his eyes he must be asleep with his ears too. He let the cat out splendidly! It's true he said she was married; but I will say for the prig that he isn't quite such a fool as that comes to. Of course he may keep a hundred women, for what I care, but—"

What he was going to add I know not. "Then whoever told you so lied," I interrupted him. "And if—"

"No one told it me, and so no one lied. And so don't make a fool of yourself, unless you are particularly bent on wearing Cram Warden's worn-out clothes."

This was too much to bear, even from him. What at the moment was all that he had done for me compared with this insult to her?

"Then I tell you—" I began.

"That it is I who lie, I suppose?" he replied, carelessly. "Well, tell me so, and welcome. I don't pretend to be afraid of vowels, and for liquids in general I have rather a liking. So I won't even throw this bottle at your head—unless, indeed, you'll wait till it's empty. It would be a waste of good liquor. But if you are in a great hurry, you had better help me to finish it."

What was to be done with such a man as this?

I only know that I acted like an idiot; and

yet, perhaps, as many a wise man would have acted in my place, even though he were not just recovering from brain fever. I just went to the table, took the bottle of brandy, and sent it flying through the window.

Things had come to such a pass with him that to deprive him of brandy when he had once got hold of it was like depriving a tiger of its food; and scarcely less courage was required on the part of him who should make the attempt than if he had been a real tiger.

Never shall I forget the angry glare that came into his eyes. For a moment I thought that he was going to send me flying after it; and he could have done so with the greatest ease. But he only, without a word, strode across the room, blurt open with his foot our apology for a door, slammed its remains violently behind him, and in another instant was out of the house, the door of which, to judge by the sound that reached my ears, he treated in the same manner as he had treated our own.

CHAPTER XIX.

"So that is the Monsieur Créville, is it, of whom I have heard Miss Raymond speak?" asked Warden, when Felix had left the room.

He looked sharply at her as he spoke; but she showed no sign of the confusion that he expected, if not hoped, to see, for the simple reason that she had none to show.

"Yes, that is Felix Créville, poor fellow."

"He is a great friend of yours, I hear?"

"Yes, indeed, a very great friend; and one, too, whom we have nearly been losing. I wish he had not come out to-day—he looks terribly weak."

"And you, too, are not looking well, Marie."

"Am I not? Then my looks belie me, I assure you. I am quite well. But I get so troubled sometimes with thinking about Angélique, and I miss the children, now they are at school. I seem to have no one to live for but myself."

Mark Warden did not observe that he was omitted from the list of those for whom she might be supposed to be living. "Marie," he said, gravely and rather suddenly, "I fear that I have been doing you a very great injury."

"Done me?"

"Yes. I have been thinking much about you of late: I have been thinking how in my selfishness I have done my best to spoil your whole life for you, and have been fearing that I must have succeeded too well."

"Why, Mark—what can you mean?"

"What right had I to take you from your home—to condemn you to this life of solitude of which you complain so justly—to place you in this false position?"

"Mark!"

"Have you not a right to complain of me? I—"

"Not the least—not the least in the world. There—will that satisfy you? And if you ever talk so absurdly again—"

In spite of her assurances to the contrary, she was indeed looking pale and worn; but to him she always strove to be the Marie of old times.

"My dear Marie," he went on, with his eyes fixed upon the ground, "your conduct has been

wonderful—admirable. You have been only too good—far more good than I have deserved."

Something in his manner puzzled her, and she looked up inquiringly.

"Oh, Mark!" she exclaimed suddenly, with hope in her eyes and in her voice; "do you mean that our separation is to end—that we are now to be together always? Oh, you need not be afraid that I can not bear good news. Is it so indeed?"

They were sitting side by side, and now she took one of his hands in both of hers, and looked up into his face with bright eyes and parted lips. He was moved for an instant—how could he help it?—by her excitement; but it was for an instant only. No—it could not be. Hugh or Felix might have yielded to this display of pure emotion, as unselfish in its source and in its nature as any human emotion can ever be, but not Warden. Is it possible that it was this very coldness of his that gave him his power, according to the theory that in all affairs of the heart it is only one of the two who loves, while the other only submits to be loved; and that it is the passive nature that rules? Let such a heresy be anathema, of course; but there can at all events be no doubt that a sympathetic heart is to a man what his left heel was to Achilles.

He did not, however, make any attempt to disengage his hand from hers. He even returned the caress, although coldly and sadly. What he had to say must needs be said; but he began to see that the saying of it would turn out to be far more difficult than he had imagined. Imagination was not his *forte*; and having once in his own mind overcome the practical difficulty of the situation to his own satisfaction, he had not wasted his resolution and his energy by mentally dwelling upon the probable details of the scene that he assumed to be inevitable. And this reserve of energy is also a secret of power.

Thus they sat in silence for more than a second; and under such circumstances a second is a very long time indeed. She was waiting for the confirmation of her hope—he was thinking how he should put things least unpleasantly, so that the coming scene might be rendered as mild as possible. It was not that he was afraid of scenes as such, of whatever nature they might be; but it was essential to his purpose that matters should go off quietly—that she should fall in with his views naturally, and that, above all, she should understand them *à demi mot*.

"Are you then so anxious?" he asked. The question was ambiguous; but the tone in which it was asked made its meaning only too clear, even to her.

She did not, however, relax her grasp of his hand; on the contrary, she only pressed it the more closely still. Her eyes saddened and moistened, but she did not lower them. She only said, very gently—

"Please, Mark, forgive me. Indeed I did not mean to complain."

"I know that; but—"

"Oh, Mark!" she said, suddenly, as though the mouse had found a spirit at last, "why should we not get rid of all waiting at once, and do as other people do?"

"No, Marie; I will not add to my offense towards you. I—"

"Your offense? Did I not say—"

"Well, to my thoughtlessness, then; and that is surely an offense. I will not treat you as—as Lester has used your cousin. I will not condemn you to a life of poverty now, after having contrived to save you from it for so long."

"Do you think, then, that I should fear poverty? Do you think that I have waited because I preferred waiting? And—and do you think that I would have spoken as I have if there had been still reason to wait any longer?"

"Still reason! Have you forgotten my fellowship?"

"Oh, give it up at once! What is it, after all, that should keep coming between us forever? Suppose you had not got it, we should have been married just the same; and we should have had to do without it altogether."

"Yes—and have starved. I doubt if I could even have become a country curate, with a Catholic wife."

"And supposing you were to lose your fellowship now—how I hate the word!—what should you have to do?"

"My dear child, how can you ask such a question? What is Lester doing, for instance?"

"And supposing we could do without it?"

"Yes—suppose the skies were to fall."

"Well—suppose they have fallen. Can you guess how much money I have made within the last two months?"

"How much?"

"A hundred and forty pounds!"

"What! by playing the piano? Is it possible?"

"So it seems. But I thought I should surprise you when you came to find out that your poor stupid Marie could do something, after all. I am sure you could not be more surprised than she was herself. And now, have not the skies fallen?"

Certainly Warden was astonished. "But do you mean to say that you are likely to earn so much money always?"

"I hope so—if I work hard. People need never go backward, Monsieur Prosper says. And at all events I might—I am sure I could last for a few years, till you become all that you want to be."

She had certainly cut the ground of the Fellowship from under his feet. But he was by no means driven into a corner.

"But, Marie, do you know what it is you are asking me?"

"Certainly I know: to go on reading for the bar; to go into Parliament; to do all you can in the world; and to let my piano take the place of your Fellowship."

"How I wish it were possible!"

"And why should it not be?"

"Because it is quite out of the question for a gentleman to live upon his wife." To do him justice, without giving him credit for the fine feeling that he claimed, such a proceeding would honestly have been gall and wormwood to a man of his energy and self-reliance. But Marie did not see it in that light; and this time it was for her to be astonished. He did not, however, give her time to reply, but, making the most of his point, went on quickly:

"Do you think that I, for five or six or even seven years to come, could submit to be kept in that way—to become one of the contemptible race of

artists' husbands? No—that is one of the things that I would not do, even if I could—even if it were possible."

"What! may not a gentleman be helped by his own wife?"

The words were spoken in all simplicity; but he fancied that they rang a little contemptuously. He was wrong; but his fancy was not altogether without ground.

"You do not understand," he answered; "women never do. It is a question of honor, you see—"

"*Mon Dieu!*"—she often reverted to French exclamations when excited, as, of late, had not seldom been the case—" *Mon Dieu!* I certainly do not understand that I should go on making money for us both and for the children as well, and to help *Angélique* too, perhaps, and that you should not be allowed to gain any thing by it! I am sure that I would take any quantity of money from you."

"But that is different. The husband is bound to support his wife—and it is bad enough of me to be doing nothing for you. But if, instead of merely doing nothing, I were to rob you, to rob the children, to rob *Angélique*—that would be a disgrace; and that I will not incur."

But still he had not perceptibly advanced very far with what he really wanted to say; and he felt like a chess-player who has managed to lose none of his pieces without an exchange, but who has not yet succeeded in obtaining the attack. Nevertheless, though he had heard much that might well have given him an excuse for declaring the game drawn and yielding to destiny, he was determined to pursue it to the end. A man who has become fairly intoxicated with some Earl's Dene is not so easily to be sobered. It is true that one wife making money at the rate of eight hundred a year was actually in his hand; but the wife in the bush was worth a great deal more than two of her. No one would deny, in spite of the proverb, that even one plump pheasant, not to speak of two, though still in the bush, is more than worth a sparrow, though the latter may be actually in the hand. To take Marie, even supposing that her present success was to continue, was to give up more than the chance of becoming master of Earl's Dene. It would be to forfeit Miss Clare's favor and his prospect of his seat in Parliament, and to be thrown back once more upon the slow path of the bar. Not only so, but all the trouble that he had taken to bring about Hugh's marriage with *Angélique* would have been altogether thrown away; and although he was not in the least dissatisfied with his proceedings in that matter so far, still, if what he had done should prove useless, he would be obliged consciously to recognize the fact that he had not been actuated by a spirit of the highest honor. If he were to make up his mind to let bygones be bygones and to take Marie, it would have been better, not only for the sake of his self-respect, but of his self-interest also, to have kept his friend Hugh in a position in which he might have been made available as a patron. No—he had certainly committed himself too far to a line of conduct to draw back now in such a manner as to secure either satisfaction or profit.

And then he thought of Alice Raymond herself, and persuaded himself that he was really in love with her, as a man with a woman, and that

Marie was an obstacle in the way not only of interest but of love also. For conscience, when, as usual, it finds itself powerless to warn and restrain, invariably goes over to the enemy, and betakes itself to the pleasanter task of excusing and justifying.

"Well," he thought to himself, "why should I hesitate? She is not my wife in any true sense—she is not even my mistress. How any man who is used to this kind of thing would laugh at me! Marie," he said, rising suddenly from his seat beside her, "I have been thinking a great deal lately, and blaming myself terribly. It is time all this should end. You have now made a career for yourself without me, and have made your own circle of friends. I can do nothing for you. I have been far from being your friend: and I will not, having thus left you to struggle alone, take advantage of your success. That is quite out of the question. It is not that I care for the opinion of the world; but I will not submit to be obliged to despise myself, and not only so, but to feel that I ought to be despised by you. Your offer to me just now was a cruel kindness. No, Marie; our roads in life—which never lay together—have now diverged wholly. It is no use now to think of what might have been: I must now—for it is the only thing in my power to do for you—set you free. We shall still be friends—we never could have been more."

Had Marie's experience of the world been such as by this time it no doubt ought to have been, she would—as he hoped she would—have caught his drift at once, and have seen that all his periphrasis was but meant to sweeten the draught that sooner or later she would have to take, whether she chose or no. But to her it seemed only that he was influenced by generous self-denial and excessive scrupulousness. Yet even so his want of warmth puzzled her and made her afraid.

"Mark," she said, with a decision of voice and manner that had never appeared in her before, and with all her earnestness in her face, "I too have of late been thinking much about ourselves; and I, like you, have felt that things can be no longer as they are. Do you think I can not—yes, in fifty ways—help you, and not by making money alone? That is not all I mean by help. I would wait still more long and patiently than I have waited, and be still content. But, Mark, I try so hard to do and think all that is right by you and by myself; and then, you know how very seldom now we ever meet—how very little yet we have ever been to one another—we, who ought to be all to each other always!" She looked up at him timidly and questioningly, as though she too wished, if it were possible, to be understood *à demi mot*—as though she had much to say that she would rather not seek to put in words.

"Oh, you can not know the nature of my life," she went on; "how very lonely I am in all this whirl—how this new life to me, who have lived in silence all my days, is almost more than I can bear. We all need some support or other; and I have none on which to lean with safety. Do you know, sometimes I fear myself?"

"Fear yourself?"

"I can not tell all that I mean; but I am sure of this, that if we do not come together now, we never shall. The world is coming between us; and you are drifting from me, Mark, farther and farther."

"And you from me. Is not that what I said just now?"

"No—not I from you. All that I ask of you is to be allowed to be with you and to help you in your life, and to be helped in mine—for that is now what I would say before all other things. I will try to make up to you for all you lose and more, in every way—even in money; and you will save me from myself."

"Really, Marie, I do not understand you in the least. You speak as though you were in some mysterious danger."

"I mean, a wife should have no friend before her husband."

Mark looked at her quickly—he thought he began to see her drift, and congratulated himself on having proved himself a true prophet. "Monsieur Crèveille, for instance," he thought to himself; but of course did not say so.

"Is not that also what I was saying to you?" he asked. "Yes—it is quite true that our lives have wholly diverged, and can never be the same again."

"But they can—indeed they can, believe me! We can still be all to each other, as we hoped for once, and as we ought to be and can be now. If it is only for my sake you wish me still to wait, indeed there is no need. It is for my sake that I ask you now to wait no longer."

"And, Marie, once more I tell you, for your own sake, that it can not be. Only think for a moment. I must wait five years yet before I am entitled to hold a brief; and as I mean not only to get a great many briefs but to be able to make the most of them when I get them, I must devote those five years exclusively to preparation. I know that some men go into the profession upon nothing but the light of nature, and that some of them succeed nevertheless; but that is not my way. I shall not only put myself in the way of success; I shall make myself sure of it, as any man may if he goes the right way to work. Thus, meanwhile, I shall not be able to earn a penny; and if I get into Parliament, I shall have no more pennies than I shall be obliged to spend. And live upon you I will not—I say that once for all. And so I must keep my Fellowship. We could not, in any case, look forward to coming together within ten years at the least, unless we agree to ruin each other—and I will not be the one to ruin you, at any rate."

"And do you think that I— Oh Mark! you are by far the wiser, but I know that I am right in this. Ruin each other? No—but help each other! and it will be too late. I did not think so once; but now I fear myself—fear every thing."

"Too late? Yes; I fear it not only will be, but is, too late."

"Mark, are you hiding any thing from me? Are you afraid to tell me what you think I can not bear?"

"Not the least—that is— No, Marie, I have nothing to tell you. You must not think I have been speaking selfishly—"

"Oh, I am sure of that!"

"And I heartily wish things were different. But it is time for this farce to be over. I am not your husband, you are not my wife, in any true sense. We have no children; the world knows nothing of our relation to each other, and is not likely to inquire. Let us then act as though this

foolish business had never had a beginning—let me set you free once more. Do not force me to do you an injustice.”

“You mean that we should still keep living on as we are now? Well—if it must be so—but it is hard to bear.”

“No, Marie, not as we are living now. Let us consider that instead of being married we are only engaged. We have only been through an arbitrary ceremony, after all; and should such an empty form fetter us? If we still remain in the same mind years hence—if nothing should happen to part us still more—we will marry in the face of the world; but if among your new friends—as you probably will—you should find some one you prefer to me, I will not interfere. Your happiness is all I desire, and I will do nothing to hinder it.”

Let us for once call things by their right names. This atrocious idea had seemed very plausible and easy to him while he had been evolving it, and he had almost entirely persuaded himself that Marie would be glad to see it in the same light as himself. And so far he was right, that her entire trust in him, and her innocence, which was scarcely even yet beginning to transform itself into the higher purity that comes of experience, concealed the true nature of his proposal under a mist of apparent self-sacrifice. But at the same time, it need not be said that though he was right, after a fashion, to this very limited extent, it was simply impossible that he could be right any farther, unless she had been idiotic instead of innocent, or else utterly depraved. She would have refused to understand him even had she been able; and, as it was, she could only look amazed.

“That we should marry again?” she asked.

“I mean that we must be content to look forward to that as a possibility. For the present we can be nothing to each other; and why should we thus be careful to suffer all the disadvantages of our position without having any of the benefit of it? No—it is too absurd, too childish a farce. It is that and nothing more, for two rational beings to make themselves slaves to a mere form, of the existence of which no mortal soul need know.”

He did not see that her silence and calmness arose from utter astonishment; and her way of taking what he had said encouraged him to think that he should avoid a scene, after all.

“We shall always be friends,” he continued, with greater ease, and in a tone of confidence that astonished and mystified her still more. Certainly, if she seemed to him to be taking the matter very comfortably, he also seemed to her to be taking it with a coolness that was extraordinary indeed.

“Friends?” she again asked, still more bewildered.

“Of course,” he said. “And now, for the present, we must forget our folly. You will find far better friends than I; but I shall still be one. You have behaved admirably—”

“What!” she exclaimed, suddenly. “You seem to think I understand you; but indeed I do not—not a word.”

Her bewilderment was too clear to be mistaken. He saw to his mortification that all his words had been thrown away, and that he should have to go over the whole ground again. What in the world was he to do with a woman who could not understand that he wanted to get rid of her?

It was useless to go over the whole ground again. Indeed there was really nothing left to him to say—unless indeed he should say in so many words: “I very much want to commit bigamy; in compensation, I give you full leave either to follow my example, or to content yourself with breaking the seventh commandment as much as you please; and there will be no harm in the arrangement, because no one will know of it.” But, as he could not say this, the utmost he could do was to repress her petition to put an end to their separation.

It may be a source of wonder to some that, together with the petition, he had not succeeded in destroying effectually the desire from which the petition had sprung. But there was that in her heart, though she did not know its nature, which really alarmed her, and which made her, in spite of the barrier—or perhaps because of it—which had now for so long been growing up between her and him, feel far more deeply than she had been able to express, a sort of desperate longing to throw herself upon her husband's strength for protection from herself and from her own heart. As he had himself suggested, she was indeed in a mysterious danger; and the only way of escape from it was that which he himself had sought to close.

BOOK III.—MOTHER AND SON.

CHAPTER I.

MEANWHILE, during the time that these complications were proceeding—while Angélique was incessantly devoting her long days and short nights to the half-weary, half-eager consideration of how she should contrive to turn the tables upon her apparently successful opponent, and while the latter was striving to make sure of the grapes that were hanging so provokingly just beyond his reach—there was one of whom no one appeared to think much, and who was ignorant of the plots and counterplots that were centred round her, but who, nevertheless, felt the influence of them most of all.

Assuredly it was grievous to Hugh Lester to have been deprived of his inheritance in what had to all appearance been so unkind a manner; it was bitter enough, and more than enough, to Angélique to have had to put up with the apples of the Dead Sea instead of with the fruit of Earl's Dene; and it was well-nigh maddening to her rival to have to play the part of the fox in the fable, more especially as he did not seek to persuade himself that the grapes were sour. But more grievous than the loss of an inheritance, more grievous even than unkindness itself, more bitter than Dead Sea apples, more maddening than grapes out of reach, was to Miss Clare the irreconcilable breach that had been brought

about, with but little fault on either side, between herself and him to whom she clung as a mother to an only son. That neither, considering their natures, had been much to blame, only made matters worse; for where there is no fault, there can scarcely ever be reconciliation.

It was not only that a wound dealt through the sensitive and easily-pierced armor of affection is by its very nature far less easy to heal than the worst that can be dealt in any other way, but that her own nature, almost hidden as it was under a well-nigh impenetrable panoply of her own manufacture, was more intense a hundredfold than that of all the others put together; and not only more intense, but more sensitive also, when it was once reached. With her, a feeling never remained under the form of a mere barren impulse; and it needed almost the direct interposition of some *Deus ex machinâ* to make her change a resolution when she had once formed it. But this morbid intensity of hers necessarily acted two ways. In the case of Hugh, it prevented her from even so much as dreaming of going back from the course that she had deliberately adopted; but, at the same time, it rendered that course inexpressibly hard for her to bear. To have had to lose her adopted son by reason of his own act of folly, as it appeared to her, was in all conscience bad enough; but it was infinitely worse that the death-warrant of their relation to one another should have been signed and issued by her own hand. But having once been issued, it was just as irrevocable by her or by any one else as if the issuing of it had been a matter of pleasure instead of the bitterest pain. And, indeed, there must in such cases be mingled with the pain, however bitter it may be, a certain amount of savage satisfaction, or it would be simply and utterly impossible that they should ever occur. It is only to be hoped that the spirit which leads people to sacrifice their own affections and their own hearts for the sake of punishing others, bears with it some sort of consolation; for, in spite of its cruelty, it is not altogether evil, seeing that it is the spirit of self-sacrifice, after all.

It was in a very different spirit from that in which she had looked forward to the last general election that she now approached the time when she would be called upon to supply a member for Denethorp to take the place of Hugh. Then she was supported by a sense of gratified pride; now, only by the severest sense of duty. There was not the least difficulty in her selection of a candidate, seeing that she had one ready to her hand who would probably beat back Prescott from the field as he had beaten him from it before, and who would do credit to his patroness on the hustings and in the House. But of course she could not take the personal interest in him that she had taken in Hugh; and, beyond supporting him with her interest—which, by-the-way, had been a little shaken by the events of the late contest—and supplying him with funds to carry on the battle, she could do, and did, but little.

Her agent shook his head terribly when he heard that there was to be a fresh contest so closely upon the heels of the old. An estate, however good it may be, must require a space of rest wherein to recover itself after such a fight as the last had been; and he earnestly proposed to Miss Clare that she and he between them should look out for a candidate with some capacity for

sharing the expense. But she would not hear of such a thing for a moment.

"Mr. Warden has fairly earned his claim," she said. "And if the last tree had to go, we must share Denethorp with no one. As long as I live I will put in whom I please."

Besides, the bleeding of Earl's Dene, even though it should be to death, was not of so very much moment now. If she could but leave life with honor, unbeaten, and with her duty done to the last, she would be only too glad to leave her throne altogether to her new heiress, and to retire to some Yuste where she might wait for the end. Indeed she cared but little into whose hands the sceptre might fall when she herself was gone, since it must needs be lost to her own blood. Like another sovereign, she also was inclined to say, "*Après moi le Déluge*;" in no careless or selfish spirit, but in the sense that she, so long as she lived, would endeavor to the utmost of her power to stay the flood, however inevitable it might be.

She was quite alone now, and worse than alone. During her occupation of it, Earl's Dene had been anything but a lively place, and now it was almost as though it had once more resumed its ancient religious character, and was inhabited by a solitary abbess without nuns. The servants ought to have had a pleasant and easy time of it, seeing that they had simply nothing to do; but, with the perversity of idle human nature, they were already beginning to find their places insupportable, and to form a large but useless opposition in favor of the young squire.

Their mistress had, in fact, no occupation left but to sit by herself all day long and remember—that greatest of all the curses, when it is not the greatest of all the blessings, that belong to age. And, as is always the case, it was those days which were farthest away from her that filled the largest and clearest place in her memory. Youth, while present, is so much like a dream, that it can scarcely be said to live until it is past; and her own youth, exceptionally dream-like as it had been, had also been of a nature that rendered it impossible to forget.

It can scarcely be a matter of wonder, however morbid, in one sense, her feelings in this respect had become, that she referred her last great sorrow to what she, in the strict spirit of judgment that she always brought to bear upon all that concerned her, considered to have been her great and many sins of disobedience and rebellion. She had been stung in the very part wherein she had offended; and even though she had spent a lifetime of repentance, she was unable to doubt the justice of what had been laid upon her to bear. It seemed to her that even as she had, according to her exaggerated view of the matter, proved a curse to her own father, she was condemned to suffer in like manner through her own child, who had torn himself from her in a way that of all ways was calculated to wound her most deeply. The morbid consciousness of having sinned, which is always strong in proportion to the slightness of its foundation, caused her to look upon the whole of her subsequent life as an unending penance, to which the peace that she had enjoyed of late years had only lent an additional sting. And yet, although she looked upon Hugh as in this respect an instrument in the hands of Providence, she did not any the more holgh

excused. If she judged herself hardly, she judged others more hardly still. Indeed, it was not so much the offense against herself that she was unable to pardon, as the offense that, in her eyes, he had committed against the traditions of his rank and family, and against what was becoming and honorable.

In the case of any ordinary woman, of a weaker mind and less intense nature, one of two results would have been inevitable. She must either have accepted her situation, and have sought to escape from herself by entering upon that poor imitation of the narrow way that is open to the proud and unforgiving, and by spending the rest of her days according to her light, either in the practice of pious austerities or in listening to the longest sermons she could find; or else she must, on the other hand, have rebelled against Providence and against destiny, and have gone mad. But Miss Clare was not by nature of a pious temperament; nor was this defect in her character, as most people will consider it, supplied artificially by those tender memories and associations of childhood and early youth in which faith is so often born. It is of course true that natures such as hers, which in youth are the most irresistibly attracted by the barren charms of sentimental skepticism, are precisely those which are the most apt in maturer life to bear fruit in the shape of some extreme form of faith, seeing that between emotional belief and emotional unbelief there is scarcely a pin to choose; but when faith follows skepticism, it will almost invariably be found that it has preceded it also. Besides, had she been capable of undergoing this pseudo-conversion, she would have been unable to find any outlet by which it might be satisfied. The Church of St. Peter, which provides every sort of disposition with an outlet adapted to it, was to her nothing more than a name, and a disagreeable name; for Methodists and Ranters, as she would have collectively termed all sects of Protestant Dissenters, she entertained the contempt of a great lady and the hatred of a high Tory; while the steady-going Church of England of those days was certainly not, as she knew it, of an emotional character. Nor, on the other hand, was she in the least likely to adopt the other alternative. Without the aid of positive physical disease of the brain, a nature so intense and so energetic as hers is incapable of such a fate. It is dull, quiet natures, to whom emotion, when it comes, comes as something strange and abnormal, that are overwhelmed by it; not those to whom it means life and even existence. A man like Warden might go mad, but not a woman like Miss Clare. If ordinary men and women lose their reason under emotional pressure, those like her lose theirs by its absence, not by its presence. If she had in truth been shut up in a convent; if some spiritual director or tyrannous system of discipline had forced her to think it her duty to crush her nature down—she would in all probability, as hundreds in such a situation have done, have given way, and her spirit, debarred from finding its free and proper course, would doubtless have burst for itself a way to unnatural action through the channel of mania. But, as things were, she whose spirit, strong with the strength of intensity and energy, had supported her through so many long years of an imperfect and unsatisfied existence, was not likely

to break down now under one more pang however sharp, or one more disappointment however bitter. The camel's back, indeed, may be so loaded that a single straw the more may cause it to give way; but there is nothing in which a really strong mind differs more from a strong body than in this—that its strength grows in proportion to the burden that is laid upon it.

Nevertheless it was perhaps an instinctive and unconscious fear of what her fate might be if she continued to remain alone with her pride, her anger, and her grief in the hermitage of Earl's Dene, that caused her to take a step which, trivial and unimportant as it may seem, was in reality calculated to operate as a substitute in her case for a plunge into piety on one hand, and for a lapse into lunacy on the other.

It was not so much that she had become utterly sick to death of Earl's Dene, and of all things about it and belonging to it, that made the very idea of home hateful to her, and made her long to escape from the influence of its very atmosphere. It was not her way in general to seek to escape from any thing, whatever it might be, that came within the scope and range of her daily life. But it was a positive, active, and eager longing to do something, no matter what that something might be—perhaps, also, so far as her sex and age would permit, to lose herself in the great world—that led her to take a resolution that astonished all Denethorp more than if it had suddenly been entered by an invading army. She, too, felt an overwhelming desire to experience the trance of Hermotimus, and to transform herself from a cloud in the sky into a drop in the ocean.

At all events, her coachman, who for some time past had had nothing to do but smoke pipes in the stable, was considerably astonished when he was told by his mistress that she not only intended to leave Earl's Dene for a time, but that she intended to make a journey to London, which she had not seen since the days when her father sat in Parliament as member for the county, and when she herself had been little more than a precocious school-girl. Of definite purpose in this project of hers, she had absolutely none. It was simply and literally that she wanted to do something, and that there was simply and literally nothing else for her to do.

And this was really doing something, although there may be scarcely any one living who will think it so. The time has long gone by—whether altogether for good, who shall say?—when the longest journey meant any thing more than a few hours' trouble, or when there was any body in England who did not, as a matter of course, make many long journeys every year of his life. But in Miss Clare's case, the journey from Denethorp to London meant more than it meant to most people even in those days, and called for as many weeks of preparation as if she had been really a queen about to make a royal progress, or a visit of ceremony to a foreign state. Of course so great a lady as she, who stood upon her dignity on principle, could not travel but in her own carriage and with her own horses; and, while the former was by no means in the best working order for so important an undertaking, it was doubtful if the latter would be the least capable of comprehending the possibility of the existence of a road beyond the Green Dragon at Redches-

ter—a fact which the coachman must also have by this time forgotten, even if, having been in Miss Clare's service all his days, he had ever had occasion to learn it. But at last all difficulties were overcome, and the Queen of Denethorp, for the first time since she had returned to it some quarter of a century ago, left her home to appear once more in the very centre of the world.

Her journey necessarily extended over several days; not so much because she, with all her impatience, was not capable of making long stages at a time, as for the sake of the horses, which had grown fat and lazy upon the effects of their mistress's sorrow. And so she gradually proceeded by the easiest of easy marches, until at the end of six days she also had arrived in the great city that seems to draw irresistibly all things and all people to itself at last. The slight exertion of travelling, and the excitement of passing through half-forgotten scenes once more, had been already of some little service to her by having made her brood less upon herself and upon her own thoughts than if she had spent the same number of days at Earl's Dene; but still she arrived at the end of her journey almost worn out. After all, "*Cælum non animam*."

She was not able to take possession of the town house that belonged to her, as it was in the occupation of a tenant; nor had she, in her eagerness to leave her country home, taken any steps to provide herself with a substitute. So, for the present, she took up her quarters at a hotel, and forthwith sent notice of her arrival to the only two people in London with whom she was acquainted—that is to say, to Miss Raymond and Mark Warden—neither of whom lost any time in calling upon her.

How strange the world of London was to Miss Clare may be in part imagined by any one whose experience it has been to return to it after an absence of twenty-five years—a period during which every thing, even the general aspect of the streets, becomes changed to such an extent that the few remaining things and people with whom old associations are connected crop up from the level surface of modern society in defiant distinctness, like blocks of primeval granite from the alluvial deposits of centuries. It could not be long before a lady of Miss Clare's wealth and position found herself again in the world after a fashion; but it was in a world that startled the politician of twenty-five years ago. She had, in her seclusion, not neglected to keep herself awake to what was going on by the perusal of books and newspapers; but no one can understand the changes that are constantly being brought about from newspapers and books only, the study of which is as though one should read a gloss without ever having seen the text upon which it comments. Written words always take their meaning from the mind of the reader. The text consists, after all, not of what actually takes place, but of the manner in which things take place, and what people think and say about them at dinner-tables, in drawing-rooms, in the streets, and in the clubs; and not what writers think ought to be thought and said about them in studies and newspaper offices. To understand change one must one's self see and hear—one must one's self breathe the atmosphere in which change is produced; and the knowledge of facts is nothing to one who is beyond the circle of their influence.

To one who is devoid of imagination they are as meaningless as algebraical symbols scattered about at random; to one who has that quality they take any combination that he may choose to form out of hundreds, of which not more than one can be, and probably none are, right. The fact is, that Miss Clare had become provincialized, and had come to regard the capital as only a larger Denethorp. She had lost the metropolitan idea—that irreconcilable and victorious opponent of the feudal idea which, in one shape or another, always underlies the *vie de province*. She had become a barbarian, in the proper and original meaning of the word, and was as much out of her element as a prince from beyond the Indus would have found himself in Rome—not, of course, in the same degree, but in precisely the same way.

As far as concerned her outer life, she just let things come as they would, making no effort whatever to control the manner of their coming. She had, after all, taken to society in the same spirit as that in which a man—if it had been possible for any man to have found himself in a similar mental condition—would probably have taken to brandy. It may possibly be thought that she entertained some vague notion that their being in the same town together, however widely they were separated in every other respect, might perhaps in some impossible and inconceivable manner bring about, in spite of her firm determination to the contrary, some kind of reconciliation with her nephew. Certainly in such matters the hearts of women are capable of any kind and any degree of inconsistency; and such a notion, wild as it would have been, would have been in no wise unnatural or absurd. It does not by any means follow that because, knowing perfectly well as she did that such reconciliation depended entirely upon a single word from herself, she had practically vowed never to speak that word, she might not vaguely dream that by her presence in London she was aiding chance to defeat her own will. But whether this was so or not, she did not in the least act upon any such idea. She never even mentioned her nephew's name, so that her acquaintance very soon came to see that the subject was a forbidden one. Unfortunately no circumstance could have operated more against Hugh's being able to do any thing for himself, or to find friends, than this silence on the part of Miss Clare. Had she talked openly about him and his offense, and given her reasons for the quarrel, it is likely enough that he would have met with sympathy at least if not with useful help; but the form which her anger had taken was such as to leave the door open to all manner of injurious reports about both himself and his wife, and to cause him to be condemned not only unheard but unaccused. Miss Raymond alone invariably took the part of her old playfellow; but she was as powerless in the matter as she was zealous. Warden also took his part sometimes, but only when in Miss Raymond's company; and then his interference somehow invariably seemed to make the hopelessness of the breach more complete than if he had merely held his tongue and preserved a judicious silence.

It was now for about the first time in his life that the steady brain of the latter began to be just a little turned. At an age when the healthy mind is content to live in the present, and to con-

fine its foresight to the limits of the day after tomorrow, he had been led by circumstances to obtain a distant and enchanting view of a future full of infinite possibilities, that gave point and coherence to the growth of his ambition.

Now that Miss Clare was in town, he had become, or rather had made himself, absolutely indispensable to her; and, indeed, was it not his duty to render himself useful to his benefactress and patroness in every way that he could? He transacted her business for her—he advised her—he was present whenever she entertained company; he became, in short, her prime-minister, over whom, while she respected him, she could yet exercise the authority that it was necessary for her to exercise over some one. But the result was, that the more he came to mix in it, the more he came to regard the great world as his true field, and to scorn professional paths as much as he had formerly honored them as affording the best prospect of success for his special kind of talent and energy. Politics were already exercising upon his mind that strange and perilous fascination that they so often exercise over minds like his—that fascination which, once felt, scarcely ever fails to become a life-long passion. Of politics in their higher sense he was, it need not be said, incapable of entertaining the least notion; but of politics as they are understood by most who take part in them—of the politics of intrigue, of faction, of place, and of self-interest—he was capable of entertaining a very clear idea indeed, especially as he was now obliged to realize the fact that he was himself a marketable article. Not only through his association with Miss Clare, but by means of his own many merits of conversation and address, he was forming many useful connections on his own account in the society into which, no one could exactly tell how, he was making a place for himself: and, with the borough of Denethorp full in view, it would be strange indeed if he did not manage before long to make a very good bargain of himself. There were not a few men of high position and influence who, although he was still an outsider, were known to regard the Fellow of St. Margaret's as a certain acquisition to the supporters of Government; and there was no one belonging to the set which he now most cultivated who did not consider that to carry out his original idea of taking to the bar would be to throw his talents away. Moreover, he was already beginning to be envied and abused—the best omen for his future success of all, seeing that no one envies or abuses a man of whom he is not afraid. None could deny his talents; but, for the rest, men were beginning to call him, behind his back, prig, snob, legacy-hunter, turf-hunter, place-hunter, and, worst of all, political adventurer—that terrible and mysterious phrase which, Heaven knows why! is supposed to express some ineffable and unpardonable sin. It was plain from all this that, if he should, as was expected, make his mark in the House, he might certainly look forward to serving his country in no unprofitable manner, perhaps to his party, certainly to himself. The country doctor's son was already beginning to dream of the Treasury instead of the Wool-sack; and, as things seemed, not so very absurdly. In politics, as in other things, adventurers are notoriously fortunate; and why should Mark Warden be less fortunate than others are?

CHAPTER II.

SINCE the opening of this story the tables have thus been completely turned. Then it was Warden and Marie who were found at the bottom of the ladder, though not altogether without reasonable hope of being able, in course of time, to ascend a few steps; while it was Angélique who lived in present comfort, with a vista of success stretching before her, and Hugh, to whom the present was so complete—so far as life can be held to be complete without love—that the future was rendered secure. Now, on the contrary, Marie had climbed to the height of fame, and Warden had achieved so much of worldly success that his future was in his own hands; while Angélique had fallen to the earth, and Hugh even below it.

It was certainly, whatever view may be taken of his conduct, at all events hard upon the latter that he should be punished so unmercifully as he was for no greater offense than that of marrying for love; but then life is very cruel, and he who chooses to act boldly for himself, instead of sighing and yielding to "good advice," courts suffering. It is true that boldness is the best part of wisdom; but, alas! it is seldom the wise who prosper, unless they are something more than wise. Now Angélique, with all her charming qualities—and they were very charming—was one of those women who are infinitely more delightful before than after marriage—as, indeed, such very charming women are somewhat apt to be. But, though this characteristic of hers is by no means uncommon, her husband is not therefore rendered less worthy of compassion, and certainly not the less because his idol was not yet broken. It is by no means fools alone who are constant to their worship in the teeth of the faults and shortcomings of their god or goddess; and it was a wise man who said that "it is a man's faults that render him amiable." In the case of woman, unfortunately, the axiom might be extended still farther; for it is far more often her virtues than her faults that bring a man's love for her to an end. Cleopatra will be the successful rival of Octavia in nine cases out of ten. And so Hugh Lester by no means pitied himself; on the contrary, he flattered himself that though he was certainly damned unlucky he was in reality the most fortunate fellow alive—that is to say, that black was white, and that two and two made five. It is a great question if a lunatic whose monomania is of a pleasant nature is a proper object of compassion on the part of the sane, who are wide awake to all the world's disagreeable realities; and it is at least a still greater question if the man who defies some perfectly human creature is not to be congratulated. At all events, whatever may come to pass, he will have lived and loved—he will once have been happy, even though the godlike attributes of his own invention fall off before his eyes, and leave the clay which they covered and adorned in all the nakedness of its deformity. But though for the present he was fully able to console himself, it would have been some consolation to Miss Clare also had she been able to know how much worse even than she had predicted, the marriage which she had so strongly opposed had actually turned out. It is true that she still loved her nephew in her heart, and that she still wished

him all happiness and all prosperity; but it is probable that, daughter of Priam as she was, the burning of Troy must have gratified Cassandra just a little.

Let it not, however, be for a moment supposed that any theory about the nature of *mésalliances* in general is intended to be founded upon the personal experience of Hugh Lester. On the contrary, had he chosen to fall in love with Marie, when he met her under the great beech—how long ago that morning seemed now!—and had she been free, and had he married her, there is surely every reason to think that the loss of Earl's Dene would have been a benefit to him; and yet the *mésalliance* would have been equally atrocious in the eyes of Miss Clare and of the world. But then Angélique was Angélique, and Marie was Marie. It is just the experience of one man that is now in question, and not that of humanity at large, which, in its romantic—that is to say, its better and truer side—has accepted the fact that a marriage made in the face of the world is, for that very reason, more likely to be made with a right purpose, and more likely to contain the elements of happiness, than where it is open to the suspicion of being made upon lower grounds. No one is likely, save on the lowest grounds of all, and where his own self-interest is concerned, to approve of the doctrine that any one who has not the misfortune to wear a crown should be made a slave to wealth and station in a matter that concerns himself and his own heart alone—the doctrine, in two words, that *richesse oblige*. Is not, under different names, the story of King Cophetua the theme of half the ballads and half the songs that have ever been written—that is to say, of the expression of the best and most honest impulses of men and women? For every woman is born noble, by right of sex, so long as she does not render herself ignoble; while the noblest-born woman is not more than woman after all. Such, at least, is the orthodox creed of a gentleman; and such, therefore, had been Hugh Lester's, whose misfortunes, accordingly, must not be attributed to the fact that he had married a girl without means or station, but solely to the fact that the girl in question happened to be Angélique Lefort.

And for her, poor girl! while Warden's future seemed to be opening before him just like the surface of some beautiful plain that grows wider and wider every moment as the traveller, step by step, approaches the edge of the table-land that overlooks it, so hers, which had given promise of such wonderful things, was narrowing and narrowing like the face of the same plain under the approach of a night of hopeless rain. It was not more than a few months since her dreams had been turning her into a countess at the very least. Now, if she dreamed that she was secure of being able to pay the bill for the lodging of herself and her husband at the end of the week, her dream was more pleasant than usual. It was she who held the office of paymaster; for Hugh was an infamously bad economist, and, like mankind in general, as distinguished from womankind, could never be brought, either in theory or practice, to comprehend that triumph of oracular wisdom, which must assuredly have been invented in a moment of inspiration by some queen of *chiffonnières*, that a pin a day

makes a groat a year. These two now had, as much as any two rag-gatherers, to think most painfully of groats and pins; and Angélique, who was a woman, in spite of her large ideas, and a Frenchwoman to boot, took rather a pride in her judicious management of those pence and half-pence which seem so trivial and unimportant to all male creatures who are neither crossing-sweepers nor waiters at restaurants. This arrangement was useful in another way besides. Had her husband had the control of their united financial affairs, he would inevitably have made some attempt, however wild, to pay his debts—at all events those that arose from their own present daily needs—in which case the struggle that she was striving to carry on against hope would have to be given up at once and forever. But, as it was, Angélique knew enough of the ways of the world to know that a pretty woman who always contrives to dress well enough to do justice to her beauty, even though her husband is not a gentleman of good family, must be very simple indeed, and possess an unusually small amount of tact, if she can not contrive to keep very fairly afloat without any enormous quantity of present coin; and in her own case to fail to do this would be even exceptionally preposterous, seeing that ready money, even when not absolutely necessary, was always procurable to some extent from the now prosperous Marie, who took to living and dressing in a style far inferior to that of her poor cousin, in order that she might assist the latter without taking from what she considered to be due to the children and to her own husband. Of the very existence of this source of supply, and of the disposal of it, Hugh of course knew nothing; and if he sometimes wondered how they managed to get on at all, it was only to admire the excellent economy of his wife. To see her always well dressed was no wonder to him, for, as he had never seen her otherwise, it appeared to him to be a part of her very nature; and he would have been as much surprised to see her going about without her head as without the most elegant of head-gear. Indeed it is not an uncommon delusion among men who have not come as yet into personal and immediate collision with the bills of milliners and dressmakers, that pretty women obtain their plumage as inexpensively as birds of paradise obtain theirs.

A man may, and often does, bear poverty and its attendant evils essentially like a hero; but it is unfortunate that it is almost impossible to appear like a hero either in his own eyes or in those of his contemporaries. Hugh Lester was trying to do the best he could; he never complained of what he had brought upon himself, or thought for a moment of complaining: he was honestly willing and eager to turn himself to any thing to support himself and his wife as a man should; and it was certainly not his fault, but the fault of circumstance—of his education, of his scrupulousness, of his wife—that he could find nothing to do. And yet he has to appear in the contemptible light of a man who lived in idleness upon the ill-advised credit of tradesmen and upon the charity of a hard-working girl, who could ill spare what she bestowed. Who shall say after this that this story contains a hero? But perhaps it is as well that we are ignorant of the details of the *ménage* of Belisa-

rius himself—that great type of reduced gentlemen.

His poverty was the result of his own fault in a double sense. In the first place, he had clearly committed the unpardonable social offense of having deliberately brought it upon himself; and, in the second place, it need not have continued if he had only chosen to act as other men would have done. If he had properly appreciated his wife and shown himself worthy of her confidence instead of her protection, the two together might have carried on the profession or art of living without an income to very great advantage; and than this art or profession, when it is carried on even with a very small amount of skill, there is none better going. It costs a considerable expenditure of time and trouble, it is true, and often ends in a sudden crash; but the expenditure of time and trouble and sudden crashes are incidental to all professions, and it is better than other professions in this, that, although time may be money, the trouble is inexpensive and pleasantly exciting, while the crash costs absolutely nothing at all. "*Cantabit vacuus coram latrone viator*"—which, in this case, may be translated, "A man of straw may laugh at his creditors." But this was Angélique's great difficulty, that she dared not take her husband into her confidence, but had to carry on the game both for herself and for him at once, and to tell lies not only to the world at large, but to him also, whose obvious and manifest duty it was to help her to lie. "Honesty the best policy" indeed!—to quote yet another proverb. This saying must have been invented by some professor of the art of living upon nothing for the express purpose of throwing dust into the eyes and binding the hands of those upon whom, as well as upon nothing, he and his disciples live, in the same way that the rules of etiquette existing in certain less noble professions have apparently been invented for the benefit of those who have the wit and the courage to break them—heavy chains to the weak and to the scrupulous, but to the unscrupulous and to the strong nothing more than bands of tow. No wise man was ever honest for the sake of profit; and when an honest man does succeed, it is most assuredly in spite of his honesty—not in consequence of it.

Nevertheless, thank the gods! disturbed in their eternal calm only by the eternal laughter that this earth of ours must surely afford them, the secret of success is not as yet wholly revealed to men, or the world would be most intolerably divided into the two classes only of the cheaters and the cheated—intolerably in spite of the hackneyed couplet in Hudibras. There are cynics who assert that this is the case, even as things are; but though the story of Diogenes and his lantern is not bad satire, it does not quite follow that satire, to be good, need be based upon mathematical accuracy of observation. It is very likely that had the great Stoic left his lantern in his tub and contented himself with the light of the sunshine, he would not have found his search altogether in vain.

And so, although Hugh Lester may have been driven to get his living in a manner which those whom Diogenes failed to find will certainly condemn, it only proves that a man may cheat without necessarily being a rogue, and be cheated

without being of necessity a fool—unless, indeed, it is the mark of a fool to be in love with one's wife, and of a rogue to trust her. In that case, of course, as logicians say, *questio cadit*.

So matters went on for a little while. "But," Angélique used to say, whenever by chance Hugh ventured to turn the conversation upon the subject of economy, "what can you know about such things? I have been all my life learning how to make nothing go a very long way indeed; and you how to make a great deal go no way at all. We have both succeeded perfectly. Your knowledge shall be useful to us one of these days, when we are rich; meanwhile mine is most to the purpose. I promise you that I will spend willingly enough when we have plenty to spend—and besides, I should never be able to take care of thousands of pounds. But then you don't know how to manage pence and halfpence as I do." And with this she, who in spite of her professions of diffidence could have managed tens of thousands of pounds to admiration, applied her power to the no less admirable management of real pence and a great many imaginary guineas.

But at last another question arose, and that of a serious kind.

Not even genius can reach the summit of perfection all at once. Enough has been said to show that Mrs. Lester was a very good woman of business, and did not find it very difficult to keep her husband in the dark as to means of supply and ways of expenditure. But her capacity for this kind of business was the result of imagination rather than of experience—she had, in short, genius and the making of an artist in her, but she had not as yet graduated as an artist. It was impossible, for instance, for her to have attained to that intimate and practical knowledge of the law of debtor and creditor which she would doubtless, supposing it to be her fate to continue to tread the path of pleasantness upon which she had entered, very soon succeed in acquiring. But hers was rather a diplomatic than legal mind: she could gain the favor of tradesmen readily enough; but she did not understand, because she had not yet experienced, the sting that even such worms as tradesmen can put forth when they turn at last. Like most beautiful and charming women, she had far too high an opinion of the influence of beauty and of the charm of manner over men to whom beauty and charm are, after all, only the attributes of a customer: she thought that butchers and bakers, being, in all essentials, no less men than the idle and complaisant specimens of the sex with whom she had previously come in contact—no less human than Felix or Hugh—would consider themselves, as Felix or Hugh would have considered themselves, sufficiently repaid for the loss of any number of legs of mutton by a smile. But—alas in the interests of art that it should be so!—butchers have creditors, and bakers have families whose pockets and appetites have to be satisfied with something more than the looks however sweet, of a customer however pretty. For, to speak *en passant*, to this pass had she come that the path upon which she had entered was widening, little by little, into the broadest and easiest path of all. One can not hold that there is much difference in spirit between her who pays for mutton-chops with smiles and her who pays for an establishment with more than mere smiles. But this is just overstepping

the threshold of a sermon, and of a rather commonplace sermon besides, which would be out of place here. It is much more to the purpose to say at once that, in a far less time than may very likely have been suggested by what has been said, Hugh Lester, of all men in the world—who still, like most men of his stamp who find themselves in his position, fancied that the miracle of the ravens of Cherith was no miracle at all, and had almost been driven by ocular demonstration and by the faith of his heart, to believe that his wife was literally one of the lilies of the field—found himself one day suddenly touched upon the shoulder not very many yards from his own door. Unlike the experienced debtor who could not even run up against a post without instinctively asking "At whose suit?" he, absurdly and weakly enough, no doubt, was astonished to find that he was indebted to Madame Jupon, of Bond Street—who, in those days, had not heard of Madame Jupon?—to the extent of a hundred and twenty odd pounds. So far as he was concerned it might just as well have been to the extent of a hundred and twenty odd thousand, for he was just as capable of paying the part as the whole; and, in the teeth of Euclid, the part was fully equal to the whole, if not, according to the doctrine of Hesiod and of Dick Barton, greater still.

Unfortunately this, great as it was to him, was only one of many debts; nor was it long before the unlucky carrion became the sport of a legion of kites, who flocked to avenge themselves upon the bare bones of the fallen carcass for its having proved too lean to provide them with a substantial meal. It was to be noticed, however, that Mrs. Lester was not so very much put out as might reasonably have been expected when she received a note from her husband dated from Cursitor Street. On the contrary, she rose to the occasion grandly. She dashed off an answer full of hope and confidence; and then, instead of acting like a weak woman by hastening to console him who loved her so much by her personal sympathy, acted like a good wife by setting off at once to her old friend Madame Jupon.

Now, in spite of what has been said on the matter, it will probably still be thought that this climax in Hugh's difficulties was, after all, rather premature. Angélique might, indeed, one may fairly think, have contrived to postpone his making the acquaintance of her milliner's long-standing account—for it related principally to the time when she had her conquests still to make—in so disagreeable a manner for just a little longer. But the fact is, that it is difficult to do complete justice to her talents, which, with regard to this matter, she did not only show by leaving Madame much comforted in mind as to the result of a debt which for some time past she had been thinking of setting down as hopelessly bad.

It may be laid down as an axiom in social as well as in political diplomacy that, when something happens which might easily have been avoided with the exercise of a very small amount of skill on the part of the person who is principally affected by it—when the person in question has in general some diplomatic genius, and when the result is clearly for the benefit of the same person—he or she is at all events, to some extent, a not inactive agent in bringing it about.

Now, in the present case, Angélique had tried

all the schemes that were open to her, and thought over all that were not, or that could by any possibility suggest themselves to her as means of re-opening the communication between her husband and his aunt; and she had come to the inevitable conclusion that all obvious and ordinary means were as vain as they were in reality. Nothing short of at least one miracle would suffice to move Hugh in the matter; nothing short of at least ten would move Miss Clare; and, with all her talents, the power to work such miracles in either case was not hers. But even without so great a power a great deal can be done. If one only has the courage not to be afraid of difficulties, it is not so very hard, simply by watching occasions and opportunities, to convert into instruments of one's purpose the difficulties themselves. So it could not but occur to her, as indeed it would have occurred to almost every one, that to make a show of yielding to Fate was, in truth, the best aggressive policy. Hundreds of chess-matches have been won by the deliberate sacrifice even of a rook, and that not necessarily towards the close of a game. Now this slight accident that had befallen her husband could scarcely be considered as being of so much consequence as the loss of even a pawn. On the contrary, she could manage to get on without him altogether exceedingly well for the present, and to take very good care of her own beautiful self, without feeling the necessity of a knight to help her. But it was in far more than this that she hoped to derive advantage from the apparent catastrophe. It was highly important that Hugh's difficulties should reach a point at which even the most obdurate of all aunts might think herself enabled to give way without losing her dignity. Miss Clare, if she was not to be moved by affection, was just one to be moved by the fear of notorious disgrace; and as a disgrace she would be sure to consider the imprisonment for debt and the complete insolvency of Hugh. If, as seemed likely, a regular reconciliation was and must continue to be impossible, it was still by no means unlikely that Miss Clare, for her own sake, would feel herself bound to extricate the young couple from their present embarrassment, and to provide means for enabling them to start afresh under more favorable auspices than had hitherto shone upon them; a matter that would certainly be very possible for the mistress of Earl's Dene, and would not derogate a jot from the pride which she felt in holding to a resolve that was once formed. Indeed it would be nothing more than what the world would expect from her. Thinking thus, it was no more than natural that Angélique should succeed in impressing her husband's creditors with what, from her own point of view, she conceived to be the character of Miss Clare, and with the improbability of their ever being paid any thing unless they brought things to a climax at once. In short, Madame Jupon's might be the hand that smote; but the real arresting creditor was Angélique herself.

Nevertheless, grateful as Hugh ought by rights to have been to his wife for the zeal that she had shown on his behalf, he was, in point of fact, only surprised at, and certainly not gratified by, the result of her zeal. Whatever he might be afterwards, and although, in spite of his troubles, he still kept a plentiful stock of good spirits wherefrom to draw strength against

ills of life, he had not as yet come to such a pass as to look upon this new experience of his as one of the incidents of life to which a man is daily and hourly liable—in fact, as one of those diseases of poor human nature which are so common and so absurd in their symptoms as to be rather a good joke than any thing else, like seasickness, toothache, or the bilious headache that visits a man who has enjoyed himself too much the night before.

The immediate result was that he found himself compelled to breathe the atmosphere, black and fetid as if with a decayed blight of debt, that surrounds Lincoln's Inn; that he had to meditate upon himself and his position no longer, as had been his custom, at freedom upon the flagstones, but in a chair; and that he was deprived of the power of putting any conclusion at which his meditations might happen to arrive into practice, even if any had come of them—a result which, judging from the past, did not seem likely.

As may be well conceived, he was without any superfluity of coin about him when he found himself in this plight; and his host instinctively saw at once that he was not one who would do much credit to the house, or even be a fairly profitable customer. He knew that Hugh was Miss Clare's nephew and had been her reputed heir, for it was his business, and the business of those with whom he had many dealings, to know such things; but he judged by outward signs. It was a bad omen when one who looked so much like a gentleman, and was young enough to be careless and free-handed, did not accompany his inevitable demand for writing materials with an order for a bottle of champagne to oil his pen. So, as the house was full, he did not entertain so much respect for his guest as to respect his privacy; and accordingly, in the course of an hour or two, had the pleasure of introducing him to a still later comer, who, for a wonder, broke the universal rule which makes men invariably, when they find themselves in such circumstances, ask for pen, ink, and paper, whether they want them or no, but who did ask for brandy-and-water—which, though not champagne, was yet more profitable to the house than ink. There was no mistaking the voice in which the order was given; and Hugh was at once aware that he was doomed for the present to enjoy the society of Mark Warden's friend and enemy, Dick Barton himself.

The latter had entered in his usual rough fashion, and without saying a word beyond what was just necessary to ask for what he wanted, with the addition of an expletive or two of the kind which he most affected. Then he threw himself into a chair and stared hard at Hugh. Poverty certainly has the merit of bringing people together who else would never meet. At Cambridge both had been too well known, each in his own way, not to have known each other by sight; but even there they had never actually met, for there had been absolutely nothing in common between them—not even acquaintances, as any one will understand who is old enough to remember the time when undergraduate society was not, as it is now, of the nature of a social and democratic republic tempered by plutocracy, but that of an aristocracy pure and simple. Since then they had met that once in Warden's chambers, when it had

not seemed likely that they would ever meet again. Now, however, there had come to exist between them the strongest of all social bonds—the fact that neither of them was the possessor of as much as ten shillings in the world.

CHAPTER III.

It is written, saith André the Chaplain, in the nineteenth article of that Code of Love which, delivered to a knight of Bretagne by the falcon that was perched by Arthur's throne, hath been observed by all men even unto this day, *Si amor minuatur, cito deficit et raro convalescit*; which, being interpreted, is to say, "If love grows less, it quickly falls away and seldom recovers."

Now it was with the strongest and strangest feeling of mental disquiet that she had ever known that Marie attempted, as usual, to set about her daily routine of work when her husband once more left her alone at the end of their last conversation. It has been said that she had not in the least comprehended the meaning of what he had said to her any more than if he had spoken to her in the language of the said André himself instead of his own, and this is literally true; but there is a way of instinctively feeling the drift of a person's meaning which falls very far short of comprehension, but is, for that very deficiency, all the more suggestive. Once more, the half is far, very far, greater than the whole.

Of course almost any one but herself would have come to know for certain, long ago, that she had ceased to be to her husband what he had intended honestly to make her when he so prematurely persuaded her to become his wife—honestly, that is, so far as honesty may lie in fancy and passion unsupported by any of the better things that go to make love what love should be. Any one but herself would have seen, to put the matter shortly, that he was tired of her and of her love—a *dénuement* which any wise man would have seen from the beginning. But the special circumstances of her position prevented her from seeing this, however strong—strong in proportion to their vagueness and dimness—might be the warnings of her heart. She had never at any time known the fullness of the love which on both sides alike gives all and takes all without stint and without fear; and such semblance of its fullness as she had known had fallen upon her when she was a child in spirit as well as in years. Since then love had never, even for a season, been to her the daily food from which she drew her life and strength; on the contrary, her marriage, such as it was, had been to her only a kind of abstract idea, derived, not from her own experience, but from the slight and partial knowledge of marriage which she was able to obtain from her observation of the experience of others, to the use of which she did not possess the key. Of late, indeed, she had turned to other food altogether, and had come to support the life of her soul by her art and her friendship, without in any absorbing degree feeling any overpowering longing for the love of her youth, except so far as it represented and typified to her the dreams of love, unconnected with any special person, for the fulfillment of which her woman's heart could not avoid longing. In this respect her dreams

were those of a girl; and her very purity caused them to be such as a wife ought not to entertain, even unconsciously. But it must be admitted that she was not without excuse, and that the chain by which she was bound could not in any case have proved strong enough to confine the dreams of a girl to their legally proper object. Even love, unsubstantial as it is, must have something whereon to feed; and though it may be proof against absence, and even thrive upon cruelty, it must inevitably fade away before positive indifference.

But still, though indeed love may be starved to death more or less quickly, it can not be killed utterly all at once—it knows not of the accident of sudden death; and when its place has been taken by acknowledged duty, its ghost—in all appearance more substantial than the unburied corpse—will still perseveringly haunt the heart from which the rightful tenant has long since departed. Marie could have no more told herself, in plain thought, that she neither loved nor was loved in any true sense any longer than she could have told a deliberate lie, even though this would have been but the naked truth. Love itself had really died, but its soul had passed into the form of duty, on whose miserable reed she was now leaning with all her strength, as if it had been a crowbar.

Duty is at best but a weak support to a weak heart, and it is never so treacherous as when it assumes the guise of some one of its enemies; and this was her case, now that she had come to call her sense of duty love for her husband, while she called by the name of friendship what not only the keen eyes of Monsieur Prosper but the blind eyes of the indifferent world had already seen to be friendship of a very dangerous order indeed. Is it then true, after all, that the best kind of friendship—that between a man and a woman—is only a beautiful idea; that it is only love under a false and treacherous name? Is it possible that the men of “common sense” may be right for once, after all? Well, let them be right for once! It does not happen very often. Only this may be said, that whether they are right or wrong, facts are facts, and no theories will include all cases. If Marie’s friendship for Felix was fated to turn into something more, it does not follow that she thereby illustrated any theory whatever, or overthrew any.

“*Nemo duplici potest amore ligari*,” says the third article of the Code aforesaid—that is to say, no one can love two people at the same time. If friendship was to grow into love, then, according to the quoted authority, her old love must grow into friendship at the very most. But still, dying love, while it is undergoing the actual process of transformation into friendship or duty, as the case may be, is apt to die hard—to make a far more active resistance to any new-born inclination than living love—simply because it can not help having an unconscious consciousness, if one may use so transcendental an expression, of its coming fate. And so Marie’s heart fought hard—so hard that it began to ache with the struggle. Indeed she was just one of those women of gentle soul who never know when they are beaten, and will die rather than yield. Had she been free, her love would now have been hard to gain, and, of all men, Mark Warden would have had the least chance of gaining it; but, as she had once bestowed it, it was harder still for him to whom

she had given it to force her to resume her free gift.

Fame and artistic success are all very well, but where is the woman to whom they can be all? It is possible for a man to become an artist and nothing more; and then, if he does so, he remains but half a man. He has mutilated his soul, whatever he and the world may gain by the process. He is like one who has made himself a king: he has forfeited the right and the power to be happy as nature bids him and all men and all creatures. He has done even worse for himself than the man who bestows the whole of his soul’s youth in crushing the flowers that grow about and around it with his pickaxe, in order that he may grope for the mere earthly gold that lies below them. The latter crushes with the flowers the desire to enjoy their beauty and fragrance; but the former, the more he gathers merely in order that he may paint or sing them, only adds a pang the more to that struggling nature of his that he subdues. When the pith is drawn from his heart, and the poor, dry, empty thing is notched in holes in order that the sun may forget to die, that the lilies may revive, and that the dragon-fly may come back to dream, yet still—does not the story end?—

“The true gods sigh for the cost and the pain,
For the reed that grows never more again
As a reed with the reeds of the river.”

But if this be the case with a man, how can a woman bear the conversion into a musical instrument at the hands of the beast-god and live at all? None ever did—none ever can. With her, nature—not artistic or intellectual, but sheer womanly nature—will have its course; and if not in one way, then in another. Marie’s was not only deprived of its legitimate outlet, but was debarred by the heavenly force of honesty and purity from consciously seeking out for itself any that were not legitimate. Nothing seemed left to her but her art; and, true artist although she was, art with her could be no substitute for nature, any more than it can be with any other woman.

Had there been any to observe her with anxious eyes—and, Felix excepted, there was none so to observe her—they would have seen her face growing pale, the orbits of her eyes growing larger and darker, her lips growing graver. But, at the same time, those who regarded her indifferently saw no changes in her but for the better. If the cheeks were growing more pale, they were, in compensation, losing their *bourgeois* contour in order to gain a more refined and purer outline; if the gray eyes were retreating under the brows, they were at the same time growing in brightness and in depth of color and of expression; if the curve of her lips was graver, it was also at once both more sweet and more firm than in the Denethorp days. She was in fact developing from the chrysalis state of the country girl, the worshipper of Mark Warden, the friend of Miss Laura, into the *Psyche*—the woman, with all a true woman’s capacities for joy and sorrow, not of the mind but of the heart. Artist as she was almost by accident, it was not till now that the true crisis of her deeper nature had come. She, too, was being plucked from among her fellow-reeds; she, too, was having her heart drawn from her; and, though she knew it not, she, too, was feeling the sharpness of the steel as it entered through her side.

But, however it might be with her, it was becoming far different with her friend—since one must needs call him so; for, seeing that she was the wife of another man, and he the professed lover of another woman, what more should they be than friends? But still, contemptuously, or rather angrily, as he had treated Barton's not unreasonable accusation against her, he was wrong if he thought that the anger of which he was fully conscious was produced by thorough-going trust in her purity—a virtue in which no man who has lived as he had lived and experienced what he had experienced is capable of believing implicitly and unquestioningly. It is strange that a woman, even the most versed in the ways of the world, will trust one whom she knows to be a *roué*, while the least impure among men can scarcely ever bring himself wholly to trust even an angel. And so, if Marie was growing unhappy, Felix was growing positively miserable, whatever his outward life might be; and the misery which he was now beginning to experience was one with which disappointment and even jealousy itself are scarcely to be compared in point of depth and sharpness. There is a time in the life of every dreamer—that is to say, of every man who does not live by sense alone—when all his beliefs and ideas appear to him to have been mere empty illusions, and to have vanished one by one; when his mind and his heart alike seem to have grown prematurely old; when, in a word, the man not only fancies himself, but is in reality, *blasé*. The illusions, if such they be, come back again, it is true; for though it is the lot of a dreamer to grow old many times in the course of his life, he has the compensating faculty, denied to those who pass their time in waking energy, of being able to renew his youth after every fit of old age. Even as it is his to know what is meant by old age even in his youth, so it is his also to know what is meant by youth even at the extreme limit of his days. But the first time that he has to pass through the furnace of lost illusions is very hard to bear, and he clings to the last that is left as a drowning man clings to the last spar that floats within his reach. He does not know that he has only to put down his feet and hold up his head in order to touch the firm ground: he believes himself to be vainly struggling to keep himself afloat on the face of the unfathomable sea, and that if the piece of timber to which he clings in his despair should slide from his grasp, he must inevitably sink down to keep company with the remnants of so many wrecked lives. To Felix this one last solitary spar was Marie; and this, too, seemed to be slipping away from his grasp like other things. If she was what Barton had called her—and why should she not be?—then there was indeed no good thing left. He was not, of course, by any means strait-laced, and would willingly have made any woman his friend, whoever and whatever she might be, had sympathy, the one thing needful in friendship, existed between him and her; it was that, like every man, he clung, and all the more the less he believed in it, to the idea of purity in woman, and liked to think that it existed somewhere in the actual world, though but in one instance alone, and that that instance was known to him. His life had not been such as to permit of his seeing much of it, either in appearance or in reality; and he had, in consequence,

been raising Marie to be the tutelary goddess of his own special altar to Venus Urania. Hugh Lester had been loyally content to worship his image of clay; but Felix had come to lose faith in his image of gold. And so, if the former was worthy of compassion, the latter was worthy of it a hundred-fold. It was now that he was worthy of it—not when his *grande passion* had come to its final chapter. For, however much Hugh may have gained from Angélique to compensate him for what she had caused him to lose, to Felix—even supposing that he had had any thing to lose besides illusions—she would most certainly have proved to be all loss and no gain.

It was wonderful how this new disturbance of mind drove out the old. But it was something like the substitution of seven devils for one. It was not only that his faith, as it seemed, had now received its death-wound, but that he seemed besides to have lost his last friend; that he was, in truth, once more left alone in the world, and that forever. His quarrel with Barton may seem but a small matter, and not of a nature to be grieved about overmuch; but, coming as it did immediately after the latter had struck his cruel blow at the great friendship of all, he felt like that king Psammenitus, who, though he himself was defeated and a prisoner—though he beheld with his eyes his own daughter forced to draw water for his victorious foes—though all his friends and followers were weeping and lamenting around him, less for themselves than for him—remained calm and silent, with his eyes fixed upon the ground; who, though his son was led to death before his face, maintained the same attitude of stoical resignation; but who—seeing one whom he recognized as having been one of his own slaves, and whose situation was therefore unchanged, led before him among the rest of the captives—fell to weeping and beating his breast with anguish. So had Felix given way at last; in truth, because of his loss of faith in Marie, but, as it seemed to him, because of his quarrel with Barton. But though it is thus true that—

“Light griefs are vocal, mighty woes are dumb,”

still, when the two kinds of sorrow come together, it is in reality the heavy grief that speaks: and it only uses the language of the lighter because it has no adequate language of its own.

But dumb as the heaviest griefs of all are bound to be, they no less turn all things to bitterness. And, in the case of Felix, there was that also which in itself was more than enough to make the world taste bitter without any further aid.

Jealousy is the very Proteus of the passions. Moreover, even as love may drive out love, so may jealousy drive out jealousy. The loss of his faith was of course the grand blow that had fallen upon him; but there must have been some reason for his caring so much about the way in which, and the person in respect of whom, it had been dealt. Like Marie herself, he also was becoming conscious, after a fashion, of an experience that was altogether new; and, also like Marie, he was doomed to feel himself obliged to crush his nature under foot. What he had loved in Marie above all things, independently of sympathy, was her goodness and her purity: and though it seemed as though these were to be loved no more, still a feeling that is caused in the

first place by a woman's attributes is not so easily dissociated from herself, and is very apt to fasten there, in spite of a man's will, even when the attributes are lost, or discovered to have been without existence altogether.

In short, in spite of his professed loyalty to his *grande passion*, which had now grown so hollow, he was drifting into that horrible condition in which a man finds himself when he is at one and the same time forced to love and forced to despise: to love, that is, not after the manner of the body merely, which is perfectly consistent with any amount of contempt, but in the true way—the way in which contempt enters, when it does enter, like a serpent into a garden of pure flowers.

There is very little use indeed in attempting to describe what people say and do under the pressure of extreme moral pain when the pain must of necessity strike inward. It is easy enough to give an account of the heroic condition of outward rebellion into which a man falls when he loses some Rosaline or other, or when she proves cruel; but these are "any things born of nothing." When his *grande passion* had come to its untimely end, Felix had avoided his friends, thrown his dreams of love and art to the winds, and fallen into a brain-fever; but to describe his life now would be simply to say that he ate and drank and slept—after a fashion—and went about such business as he had to go about like other men. There is no passion, after all, so deep, no affection so strong, that it will not yield to the omnipotent tyranny of pride, or at all events carry itself as though it had yielded. Miss Clare's affection for Hugh had undergone this process; and it will certainly have been seen by this time that Felix, if in the matter of pride he was inferior to her, was certainly not more deficient in that quality than other men. At all events, he was too proud to confess himself the lover of one whom his jealousy, in spite of himself, forced him to fear was unworthy of the only kind of love that is worth bestowing; and far too proud to willingly render himself liable to the charge of inconstancy—a sin for which he entertained to the full the old-fashioned romantic contempt that is supposed by men like him to have existed once upon a time in practice as well as in poetic theory. He still tried his best, as a matter of conscience, to cling to the empty shadow of his old passion, and to believe in its reality, even though he must in his soul have known well that the old curse was upon him,—

"That they who change old love for new,
Pray God they change for worse;"

and that, if what Barton had said was in any degree true, it looked as though the curse was in a due way of being fulfilled.

Thus he had now to struggle, and as it seemed vainly, to carry on the losing battle of a dying love; and not only so, but to carry it on against the overwhelming force of a foe that he both feared and hated, but to which he began to feel that he was well-nigh inevitably doomed to yield at last, even if he had not yielded to it already. The night indeed was departing, and day was at hand; but the day that had begun gradually to rise was attended and covered by dark clouds of ill omen, that made it look even more threatening and full of gloom than those of the midnight that *had in its own time* seemed so terrible to bear.

CHAPTER IV.

IN some important respects, therefore, Marie was better off than Felix with regard to the relations in which they stood towards one another; and in others, no less important, worse. But in no respect was she better off than he than in this, that every day she had her daily work upon which to fall back and to expend a great part of the thoughts and feelings that would otherwise have necessarily run to disease. He might also, of course, in a similar manner, have thrown himself into work after the heroic manner prescribed as a remedy for all mental and moral diseases under the sun by the prophets of these latter days; but this is what experience, regardless of prophets and doctors, tells us not even the strongest man ever does unless he finds the hard work ready made to his hands, and unless it is peremptory. It is that the man who has absorbing and peremptory work to do is fortunate; it is not that the man who, when disturbed in heart or mind, can not make work for himself, is weak. Felix had a very little to do in a very poor way—enough in quantity to keep him afloat upon the sea of poverty—but it was not of a kind to interest him. The man who starts with an ambition to rival some Moretti, and who can not bring himself, in spite of circumstances, to treat a sublime art as a mere bread-making profession, can not be supposed to take kindly to spending his evenings in helping a number of professed swine-feeders to provide the animals who looked to them for a provision of tune and time with the popular compositions which he and his companions in the old Latin days had been used irreverently to term "*Lavure*." Among many of his companions this way of talking had of course been nothing but student-cant; and when their student days were over, they had taken very kindly to the purveying of this said *lavure* to the creatures that turn up their snouts at pearls. But Felix had been thoroughly in earnest; and, without being a racer of the highest form, he was still able to scorn himself for being forced to apply himself to the cart-horse work to which he seemed now and henceforth to be doomed. Besides, where a man has been nourished through the channel of the imagination all his days, he finds it impossible, whatever people may say, to find consolation in work for its own sake, simply because it is work, when it is utterly uncongenial to himself. A certain amount of insuperable fastidiousness is the penalty that a man must pay for the privilege of being allowed to see visions and to dream dreams. It is true that he might have found congenial occupation in endeavoring to express himself by composition, and so have let out, in the best and most healthy way, much that was turning sour within him; but the artist, at all events, will understand why this was now impossible for him. It is not under the influence of immediate external excitement that men compose; it is a sign of reaction, a proof that the excitement itself is over, when they sit down to express it in words or colors or chords. Marie, on the other hand, had never had to seek her food through the imagination: during the period of life when one becomes what one must essentially remain, she had had to draw her nourishment from practical life in the midst of commonplace and terrible realistic surroundings, so that work,

simply as work, had with her become a habit, and she would have put her whole soul, or at all events her whole energy, into it whether it had been congenial to her or not. And then, most unlike Felix in this, she had to work for others—if not for her husband, at all events for the children; while he had none to think of or care for but himself alone—a person of whom he still thought a great deal, but for whom he was beginning to care very little. Besides, her task was not to express her own feelings and thoughts, and she was very probably incapable of doing so had she tried; hers was but to express the ideas of others; and to do this well and adequately there is nothing equal to moral excitement—unless it be champagne.

But better off, on the whole, as she undoubtedly was, this was, after all, but burning the candle at both ends; and at every pause in her daily occupations, and whenever she had to rest for a while, she became subject to violent reactions—so violent as to affect her physically. There is a kind of moral delirium which, in some of its worst effects, and even in some of its symptoms, closely resembles the delirium of drink itself, and which, equally with the latter, makes the patient conversant with what is meant by *nerves*—a visitation from which Marie's hitherto healthy nature had till now kept her free. Now this kind of extreme nervous excitement would be an invaluable aid to an artist if a continuance of it did not necessarily end in killing him or driving him mad; and it would make any man capable of attempting if not of doing great things, if it did not distort his judgment—if it did not render him almost incapable of recognizing and appreciating facts so as to distinguish between the real and the unreal—if it did not lead him to act upon reason when it would be wiser to follow impulse, and on impulse when impulse is peculiarly fatal or absurd.

It was under the influence of one of these seasons of reaction with which she was now so often visited, especially when, as was now the case, she had been performing the preceding evening with even greater success than usual, that she was found by Angélique within a day or two of Hugh's arrest.

The contrast between the two cousins was now greater than ever, but certainly not in the same way as of old. There are not a few persons who would now have been tempted to say, on seeing them for the first time, that Marie was even the more beautiful of the two.

The essential part of beauty is of so subtle a character, and depends upon such apparent trifles, that it may well happen that the loss or even variation of a single unappreciable light or shadow upon the most beautiful of faces may cause nothing short of an absolute and total loss of beauty; while a like variation in a different direction may change a plain face into one that is positively beautiful. Now so much as this had not been brought about as yet in the present instance, for the features of Angélique were far too perfect in themselves to lose for a long time to come the charm that results from the perfection of sculpture even if they lost every other charm, and loss or want of natural color and tone may always be artificially supplied with a very fair amount of success. Angélique had never, even in her best days, entertained a Quakerish horror of the use

of the hare's foot, and now she was beginning to find in it a faithful, if not an honest, friend. But there is, after all, one matter in which the virtue of honesty of life and purpose—not only in respect of pearl-powder and rouge—does, for a wonder, obtain something more than itself for its reward. What that matter is, there is no need to say; it belongs to an experience so old and so wide as to have obtained the sanction of even the proverb-mongers, who, for the most part, seem to scorn to tell the world any thing that all the world has not known for five thousand eight hundred and seventy-four years at the very least. In the attempt which was made to describe Angélique Lefort in the fifth chapter of the first book of this story, mention was made of a certain want of that harmony about her which is in itself the cause of beauty when beauty is otherwise wanting. Now, this negative want of harmony had almost deepened into positive discord. The change is too subtle to be expressed easily, but is not difficult to be rendered intelligible. That small, almost too small mouth, had surely never been intended by nature to become so drawn in its lines as to appear smaller still; nor were the large languid eyes meant to express the quick and peculiar energy that was now becoming habitual to them, and that uncomfortably contradicted the increased listlessness of her figure and carriage. These are the most appreciable instances only; but they were enough to show that the spots upon the sun were not unlikely to prove an eclipse in time. And yet it was not that her style of beauty had lost any of its spirituality; on the contrary, in this respect it had gained—only in a wrong and not very pleasant direction. Marie, however, though she did not by any means see her cousin from day to day, was blind to every change; she still believed in her heroine's irresistible beauty as much as in all her heroine's thousand other perfections; and so, it seemed, would she to the end. She, unlike Felix once more, could not cease to believe until belief should be positively slain altogether. She believed in her husband still, and she believed in her cousin, *sicut erat in principio*; and, to all appearance, in spite of the efforts of one of them at least to render her an infidel, *et semper et in sæcula sæculorum*.

The cousins embraced tenderly as usual. It was some little time since they had last met; and though Marie perceived no change in Angélique, the latter with her sharper and less believing eyes, saw a very considerable alteration in Marie; and a change, moreover, which she was unable to understand. Nor did she take any pains to speculate about its signification, seeing that she had really important business in hand.

"Marie, *mon ange*, you are not looking yourself. What is the matter? Have you a headache?"

It was days since Marie had heard a word of kindness spoken to her; and though her cousin's voice never at any time had the ring of true sympathy in it, still the voice was Angélique's, and the words were kind. To the surprise of the latter, she did what she had scarcely been known to do in her life before—she threw herself into her arms and burst into a flood of tears.

It may be remembered that if there was any thing or any person save her own beautiful self for whom Angélique cared it was Marie; and to

see her overcome in so unprecedented and apparently so causeless a way distressed her in reality and honestly. She knew how hard Marie had been working of late, and how unused she was to excitement, and feared she was going to be ill. So, for a little while she petted her, and let her have her cry out.

"And now, my darling, what is it?"

Marie, having thus given way, was now heartily ashamed of herself, with all the shame of a reserved nature that can not bear to uncover its nakedness even before its own eyes.

"Oh, I am dreadfully silly—that is all: I was up late last night, and it was so hot, and I got a headache, I suppose—and I'm not used to headaches, you know. There—I'm better now, and won't do it again, I promise. I am so glad to see you again. Have you any good news? Has Hugh found any thing to do?"

"Marie, dearest, I am in the greatest distress you can conceive. Things have come to the worst at last, I really do think. And how they're to end, Heaven knows!" Her style of dress did not give the idea of very deep pecuniary distress, at all events—but that was her own affair. "I'm sure I don't," she continued. "No—Hugh has found nothing, and isn't likely to now, unless that old cat will come round."

"What? He is not ill?"

"Oh no—worse than that."

"Oh, Angélique! worse than ill?"

"Well, of course I don't mean that—"

"What is it, then?"

"Why, I scarcely like to say, even to you. You see we have been *obliged* to run into debt; we couldn't keep on robbing you forever—"

"Angélique!"

"Of course not; and so I suppose we went a little too far. Anyhow, Hugh has been arrested for what we owe."

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Marie, starting up suddenly and forgetting herself and her own less tangible troubles at once. The word "arrested" did not mean to her an ordinary accident to which all men were more or less liable, as they were in those days to taking the small-pox or fighting a duel: to her it conveyed the idea of constables, cells, chains, judges in scarlet and ermine, and transportation at least for the *dénouement*. Such was her own agitation at the ideas conjured up before her mind's eye by that in itself extremely innocent word, that she did not notice how calmly so serious a matter was taken by her whom it most concerned.

The latter, not comprehending Marie's nervous condition, could scarcely help smiling, so much more conversant was she with the ways of the world.

"And so what in the world we are to do now I can not imagine," she went on quietly. "The sum is not very large, it is true; but when one has nothing at all, it doesn't matter whether one owes much or little—I am not sure it is not better to owe much, on the whole. And if Hugh couldn't pay before, poor fellow! how do they think he can pay, now that he is shut up?"

"How much is it?" asked Marie, eagerly.

Now it must not be supposed for a moment that Angélique, having played so good a card as that which consisted in getting her husband caged, was going to lose the advantage of such an appeal to Miss Clare by getting him let out again. If

she was to be in debt, she might as well turn her debts into trump cards, and not throw them away, and the benefits that they were likely to bring, for such a trifle as Marie might be able to spare her. Nor had she foreseen that the first thought of her cousin would have been how Hugh might be restored to freedom. It would certainly not have been her own first thought under similar circumstances, inasmuch as she had by this time learned the value of money; and so it did not occur to her that it would have been that of any one else. But still, under the influence of the new light that Marie's last eager question had given her with regard to the extent to which impulsive generosity might go, she considered for a moment before she answered,

"Oh, it is not a very large sum—at least Miss Clare or Miss Raymond would not call it so. It is only large to paupers like us. It is not more than fifty pounds or so."

Marie's face fell. To a woman whose financial operations consisted in dealings with shillings, and who has no debts, to owe fifty pounds all at once, without having the means and ability to pay them, seems something very dreadful indeed. And, in point of fact, fifty pounds was a sum that she herself could very ill afford to spare immediately. One may be in the enjoyment of a great deal of fame, and be getting on in more substantial respects very well and very securely, and yet not be in constant possession of a balance to the good of even so much as the sum of which Angélique had spoken so slightly.

"Fifty pounds!" she said. "And will paying that get him out of—"

"Yes; I should think so. Of course there is what are called costs, and things. But I have no doubt that would do, if one only knew where to get it."

"Prosper owes me some money," replied Marie, hesitatingly, "and he has sometimes made me advances. Perhaps—"

"But, my darling, I could not think—"

"But surely—when Hugh is in prison! We will go and see Prosper at once—"

"No; that would hardly do. My husband's misfortune—"

"But we need not tell him what it is for."

"In that case—but are you sure you can spare it?"

"My dear Angélique, what a question!"

"Well, you are *mon ange* indeed. What can I say to you? By-the-way, have you seen any thing of your old friend Mark Warden lately?"

Marie flushed, and then grew pale, as though her ears had suddenly caught the name of a lover; and for the same reason. For her mind was confused with regard to her feelings towards him, and to his towards her.

"No—not for some time."

"Ah, I suppose he will forget us all now. What luck some people have! And yet he had no better chances than others."

"Forget us! Why? What has happened?"

"Why, Marie, you look quite frightened. One would think you were back in the days of the old flirtation at Denethorp. But you are not, are you? Well, you have both had better fortune apart, I must say, than if you had come together, as we used to joke about. My angel has become a great artist; and he, who was never

fit to look at her—as if any man in the world was fit to look at her—”

“Well?”

“It certainly is a piece of news. It will astonish Denethorp with a vengeance, and quite throw into the shade my own little escapade. He is going to be master of New Court—there!”

Nothing could have been more bitter than the tone in which she, as it were, threw these words at Marie. But the latter could not be expected to understand them. She could only repeat her cousin's bitter words in the form of a blank question.

“Going to be master of New Court?”

“You may well ask like that! Yes; old Dr. Warden's son, Lorry's brother, the grandson of a country shopkeeper, is going to marry Miss Raymond, of New Court. Well, we women are strange creatures!”

Well indeed might Marie, being what she was, and knowing what she knew, be taken aback by such news. Had her last conversation with Warden never taken place, she would have treated such a report as false on the face of it. But with that conversation still fresh in her recollection, the very suggestion of such a report, unproved as it was, and false as it must almost of necessity be, was, at all events, sufficient to open eyes that were even as blind as hers were. And it did open them—or rather tore them open, for they insisted on keeping themselves closed even still; so much is constancy difficult to convince of inconstancy. Yes; in spite of Felix, in spite of all things, she was constant still, though the constancy had but little to do with the source from which constancy should spring. No one can rule his heart in such matters; but women like Marie can refuse to be ruled by it—and that is constancy of a nobler sort than mere incapability of changing. The latter is, after all, but the constancy of the needle to the pole, which remains unvarying and unvariable because it is involuntary; the former is that of a martyr to his faith, who remains true to it because of his will.

She spoke, however, very calmly and quietly—much more like her old self than had of late been the case—as she replied,

“That can not be, Angélique.”

“Perhaps not; but it is true, all the same.”

“Who told you?”

“Did you ever hear of a great friend of Mark Warden's called Barton?”

“I have heard of him.”

“He is with Hugh now, where they are keeping him, at a place near Holborn—so you see I have the story on the best authority. And if I had it on worse I should believe it, for I have guessed as much all along.”

There was so little confidence between the husband and wife, that for aught Marie knew, Barton might be the most intimate friend that Mark had in the world. But she made no further answer, for her heart gave a leap at the sound of a knock at the door, which she recognized only too well.

CHAPTER V.

It was the very first time that Felix had come across Angélique since her marriage; and he had of late been so much in the habit of visiting her

cousin without seeing herself, that he was never prepared to meet her now, and had quite forgotten that the frequency of his visits had originated in his desire to see her and not Marie.

The situation was therefore more than sufficiently embarrassing for a man who like him had never graduated in the school of society that teaches its scholars never to find any situation in the world embarrassing, from the extrication of an army from an enemy's country, up to the extrication of one's foot from a lady's dress in a ball-room. Certainly there was no reason on earth, in the nature of things, why he should feel dissatisfied with himself. He had been the victim, she the betrayer; and he had therefore every right, if he was so minded, to claim the dignity that is the privilege of the injured party in such matters. And so, had he been Angélique and had she been Felix, he would have both felt and acted. But being as they were—he the man and she the woman—it was he who somehow felt as though it had been he and not she who had been the one to blame. A woman who is no longer a child is always mistress of such a situation, and if she has only a very little tact may always shine in it to advantage, however much she may in reality be in the wrong; while, on the other hand, a man requires to have both experience and genius in such matters to come out of it with even as much as decent credit, however much he may be in the right. Perhaps Felix was also weighted with the feeling that, when all was said and done, he had sinned against the gospel of romance by not having been altogether so true to the memory of his old passion as he had once vowed to be; for inconstancy on the one side is not, in the creed of such as he, held to be a set-off against inconstancy on the other. On sounder grounds there was plenty of excuse for him, no doubt; but then,

“*Qui s'excuse—*”

Not that Angélique's large eyes supported any such self-accusation by the faintest touch of upbraiding. She did change color for one imperceptible moment; for there are some things which the least worldly and practical-minded of women is incapable of forgetting, or at least of remembering without some shadow of regret. The less of true romance that there is in the composition of any one, the more apt is the voice of false sentiment to make itself heard; and of false sentiment Madame Lester had always had her full share—no less now that her reading consisted of little that was more sentimental than butchers' bills, than when she used to identify herself with Byronic heroines. Moreover, it did not by any means seem to follow in her eyes that because she chanced to be so unfortunate—as it had turned out—to be married, she should lose her sway over any of her adorers, even though, as in the case of Felix, she should gain from them nothing more valuable than a little adoration. And then she felt kind to him for old recollections' sake, and as a woman can not help feeling towards one who has once loved her and whom she supposes to love her still. But still she was far from allowing any trace of her emotion to be visible; and indeed it was far too slight, such as it was, for her to be conscious of having felt any whatever. On the contrary, she at once frankly held out her hand with the air of welcoming an old friend, and said,

“*Mais, Monsieur Créville, you come in time*

to convince this doubter. Is it not true that Miss Raymond is to be married?"

"What! my old pupil? I had not heard it."

Her manner had put him at his ease, so far as she was concerned; and so it could not be that his preoccupied air had been caused by embarrassment alone. Angélique noticed his worn appearance; and, taking it as a compliment to herself, felt more kindly towards him still.

"And you do not ask to whom? But I forget—you would not know him. We provincials forget that there are people in the world to whom our little celebrities are unknown. And yet you must know him, though—you are a friend of Mr. Barton?"

"Of Barton?"

"Yes; and so is he."

"I should scarcely have thought that any friend of Barton would have fallen in Miss Raymond's way."

"Oh, I don't know. Marriages are made in heaven, they say. Mark Warden is the favored mortal. Do you know him?"

For what purpose Felix, full of involuntary suspicion of Marie as he was, had still once more come to see her, is not difficult to guess, as long as moths will insist upon flying into the flame in spite of the warning that ought to be taken from the fate of millions of ancestral generations. It may, however, be assumed that, as he himself supposed, he had come to bid adieu to the last of his illusions before he cast the dust of England from his feet forever.

Now Angélique had been able to take great credit to herself for her passing gleam of sentiment. She was proud of it, and of herself for having been capable of feeling it. But Felix, except for the feeling of embarrassment when he first perceived her, and of which he now felt almost ashamed, had felt not even a passing gleam. No sooner had he met her eyes, no sooner had she spoken, than it was plain to him that the Angélique whom he now saw before him was the Angélique of his *grande passion* no more; if, indeed, the Angélique of his *grande passion* had ever really existed in the flesh. In that moment he felt that something else besides his own heart had changed; or rather, that his heart had been false to her because it had never ceased to be true to the ideal that he had sought in her and had found—where?

Where indeed? It was clear enough even to him, in the light of the flood of joy that rushed into his heart when he heard the last words of Angélique, and looked up suddenly at Marie. His doubts of her had then, after all, been as absurd as he had been trying vainly to persuade himself that they were, and Barton had in truth been slandering her as grossly as he had been trying, with equal ill-success, to force himself to assume. Had any sort of connection really existed between her and Warden, it was not thus and in her presence that Angélique—who must have known of it—would have spoken.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, with a sigh of something more than relief. "Do you know Barton, then? How long has he known this?"

"Not long. It is only just settled, it seems. It is a curious match, is it not?"

"Anyway, the bridegroom is to be congratulated. And how is Barton? I did not know you knew him."

"No more we did, till yesterday. Is it true that he writes the dramatic criticism for the 'Trumpet' and that you actually allowed him to insert that odious review of poor Miss Marchmont? For shame! Ah, you cared a little more about her than that once upon a time—did you not? What a couple of silly children we were; but they were pleasant days, all the same—those delightful days when we were so miserable. We shall never have such pleasant ones again—no, not when you have all the world at your feet, and when I—well, I shall have dropped out of your life then, *n'est ce pas, Monsieur?* Marie, my angel, now I must go and carry the news of your generosity to poor Hugh. *Ad revoir, donc, mon ange—et vous, Monsieur, s'il vous plait*—and then we will talk about the old times once more—and you will not laugh at me if I can not quite laugh at them, will you?"

And so, with a parting embrace to her angel and another presentation of her hand to the lover for whose death she had so nearly and so lately been answerable, she once more carried into the street her last purchase from Madame Jupon.

But although Felix had received an unmistakable lesson from the unspeakably joyful relief that the words of Angélique had given him, he was certainly no nearer reading what was in the heart of Marie. All that he could think of now was that she was in reality all that he had supposed her to be; that she had once more been restored to her pedestal above the altar. How could he ever have committed the treason, the blasphemy, of having even for a single moment cast her down? Surely, it now seemed to him, he could never really have done so—he must always, in his heart of hearts, have remained loyal; the disturbance could only have been in his fancy—in his mind.

But Marie!—

Whether she still loved her husband or no, there is but one word to describe her state; and that word is desolation. Whatever her feelings towards Felix might be, they did not subtract from the force of the word.

The state of nervous excitement, or rather exhaustion, in which she was, and in which the activity of the memory and of the imagination fully made up for the loss of calm reason, caused her to comprehend at once and to the letter every word that had passed between Mark Warden and herself in the course of her last interview with him, and that had then been so unintelligible. So plain had the meaning of it grown now, that the amount of truth that might lie in the report which she had just heard was altogether immaterial. Whatever might be the explanation of that report, the fact remained and stared her in the face—not, perhaps, the fact that he was actually about to leave her for another—that must be as she willed, to say the least of it; but certainly the fact that he wished to do so, and that he had actually proposed it to her almost in so many words. At present, though she realized this, she was incapable of realizing how it affected her. It is weaker women than she whose feelings in such matters are sufficiently simple to find at once a way into action, whether by the road of anger or by that of tears. Besides, the mind of Marie was always a little slow to bring itself into action whenever it was necessary to blame others, or even to think them in the wrong, while her eyes were not apt to weep for her own sorrows.

So, for the present, she was simply turned to stone; and the last words of Angélique had fallen upon deaf ears.

Felix. "So my first pupil is to be married! How old it makes one feel! And the bridegroom—is he the Mr. Warden whom I once met here, and to whom you introduced me?"

Marie (starting from her stupor, and suddenly). "I beg your pardon—"

Felix. "Are you not well, dear Marie?"

Marie (dreamily). "Oh, I am quite well—only a little tired, I suppose. I am not used to late hours yet, you see."

Felix. "And your head aches, does it not?"

Marie. "A little—but it is nothing."

Felix. "And I am boring you to death, I suppose."

Marie. "Oh no; why should you be?"

Felix. "I am sure I must be, though. And I really came for no purpose in the world—so—"

Marie. "Oh, you need not hurry to go: and yet, yes, I really am quite well; I am only very stupid, as usual. There"—drawing herself up with an effort, but with a smile—"“*Io son Guglielmo Tell!*”—What was it you asked me just now and that I was rude enough not to answer?"

Felix. "Oh, only about my old pupil's future."

Marie (bravely). "Mr. Warden. You met him once here. They will make an admirable match, though Angélique does not seem to think so. She has a great fortune, and is good enough for any body, and so amiable!—and he has great talent and great ambition, and will make her the wife of a great man, as she deserves."

Felix (coldly). "Indeed!"

Marie. "Yes. He only wanted the means, and now he will have them."

Felix. "You seem to have great faith in him."

Marie. "I go by what I hear—nothing more."

Felix. "But you know him?"

Marie. "What can girls like me know about the lives and careers of men? We see them as they condescend to show themselves to us—the outside; but as they are to each other and to themselves—never."

Felix. "Never?"

Marie. "Or when we do see them as they are, it is only to find out that we stand in their way."

Felix (unable to help observing the scarcely perceptible tinge of bitterness in her tone, and the involuntary comparison that she had suggested between herself and Miss Raymond). "And you think, then, that Miss Raymond will not stand in the way of this friend of yours?"

Marie (alarmed for her husband's secret, and exaggeratedly alarmed about what her words, which she had forgotten, might have led Felix to suspect). "I hope not. I wish him well, like all my friends. But have you no news of yourself?"

Felix. "I? Not a word. I never have. I manage to keep body and soul together—or at least the body without the soul—which can scarcely be called news. That is about all—and the process is not very interesting to lookers-on."

Marie. "But it is interesting to me, *mon ami*. I can read the stars, and like to watch how my prophecies come true."

Felix. "I am afraid that is not a very profitable knowledge. I thought I could once; but it was only to find them as ambiguous as earthly oracles, and even more treacherous."

Marie. "I want you to promise me something. Will you?"

Felix. "If it is to do any thing for you. I owe you so much, and have never done any thing for you yet."

Marie. "Yes, it is for me, if that is any satisfaction to you. But it is not because it is for me that you must do it."

Felix. "Why not? I am sick of trying to do things for myself—and you, I think—I hope—are the only person likely to care about what I do."

Marie. "Will you promise? I am speaking seriously."

Felix. "Of course I promise."

Marie. "Felix, my friend, I can not help seeing that for some reason or other you are bent upon making a wreck of your whole life. Yes—it is perfectly true. You have plenty of talent; and I have not known you all this long time so well not to know that you might easily in due time take the position that, as you have often told me, you were once ambitious of taking. Besides, is it not due to Prosper, to your old benefactors, to Moretti himself, to justify them in the interest they have taken in you, and the sacrifices they have made for you?—I may speak plainly to you, I hope?"

Felix. "Always."

Marie. "Do you remember telling me of your childhood, and of your first insight into the existence of an art-world outside and above the mere world of nature into which you had been born? Ah, you were fortunate, more fortunate than you can tell, in waking to it so early! Art was thus able to become to you a second nature; it did not come to you, as it came to me, too late for me to find in it another and nobler world. Do not throw away this good-fortune of yours, which comes to so few! Would you throw away your art, your power of doing something for it and for the world, your duty, your true soul, the life that nature and art and God have given you, for the sake of a shadow of a memory? No, my friend—leave such weakness to women; but let me believe that there is at all events one true man in the world."

Felix. "Marie!"

Marie. "Oh, I know what you mean—I do not mean true to a woman. That is something—but I do not mean that now. And truth to a woman is worth nothing when it prevents a man from being true to himself; and you are not being true to yourself, if you can forgive me for saying so. Romance is an ornament of life—the gilding to hide its hardness, its coldness, its grossness, its littleness, if you will; but it is not true gold, and one must take life as it is, after all, and not as we would have it seem. We are not in the world to make love and make each other—well, miserable; for that must be the end of all falsehood."

Felix. "But there is such a thing as love that is not falsehood and not misery. I understand what you mean; but I have learned a great deal lately. Marie, you are only too right in one thing. I have indeed been weak, blind, ungrateful, false to myself and to all that is good and true even more than you think; but I will be so no longer. I promise you with all my heart that, with your help, with your sympathy, I will go forward in the right path so far as I may. I may

never be a great artist—Prosper is right: the great artist must be something more than man, and must use emotions, not suffer or enjoy them. But to be a man is better than to be an artist—and that, if you will help me, I will be.”

Marie. “Man and artist too. I do not ask you to lose your sympathy with the world and exchange your heart for a musical machine—God forbid! But art is work; and it is work worth a man’s doing, without respect to what he may enjoy or suffer by it.”

Felix. “But—”

Marie. “Ah, it is a grand thing to be a man and not a woman! No wonder we women despise a weak man—for no man need ever be weak. We are wrong perhaps in thinking so, for the battle of the world is no doubt harder than we think for, who know it not in all its strength. But we are right in thinking that combat should give strength, not destroy it.”

Felix. “Marie—can it be that you too have suffered, that you speak thus?”

Marie. “I!”

Felix. “Forgive me—”

Marie. “My friend, who has not suffered? who does not suffer? Yes—I do suffer when I see you still a slave to a woman. Shall I tell you something! Well, then, learn from a woman that no woman is worth the loss of a man’s whole life—no, nor even of a part of it. Is it not true that every man has a career into which no woman may enter? Is she not a hindrance and a stumbling-block to him in his true life? Is he capable of entering into the little trivial matters that make up hers? Is not the kindest thing she can do for him to leave him free? Oh, my friend, be warned: recognize your career, for you have one; do not be a slave to a fancy, for it is nothing more. I know you can be strong, if you only will. Do you know what I would do were I a man? I would pray God every day to save me from woman’s love—not only for my own sake, but—for theirs.”

Felix. “No, Marie—I am no slave to a woman. Those chains are broken forever—if indeed they were ever whole. And you are wrong—wrong a thousand times. There are women in the world who are worth the loss of any man’s life; for they supply him with a nobler and a better. There are women who are not only no hindrance but an aid and a motive to the noblest career. Yes, and there are men who can appreciate the perfection of sympathy. Where—how—can you have learned so bitter a creed as yours?”

Marie. “Ah, if I could but think so!”

Felix. “You do not know what love means, you who have never loved.”

Marie. “And you?”

Felix. “I have found out what it means. I am wiser than you.”

Marie. “Then—”

Felix (warmly). “Do not be afraid—such love as mine is of that kind which you deny. ‘If I could but think so,’ you say—you, the truest-hearted of all women! What is sympathy but that very kind of love in which you do not believe!”

Marie. “I do not think so. And now give me your promise. I am right—I know more than you do, after all. But I do believe in sympathy; and if any feeling on your part that there is one

who sympathizes with you so far as a woman may can help you to keep that promise, that feeling may be yours.”

Felix. “Oh, Marie—if this is so, then I can keep it indeed! For your sake I will strive to be all things. Will you indeed help me?”

The conversation up to this point had been almost studiously calm in its tone, as of two persons who had suffered and experienced, and were now discussing in abstract fashion the ways of the world rather than their own needs. But the barrier had been growing less substantial every moment, until, to Felix at least, it had passed away altogether, and left, as he thought, the soul of Marie as unveiled before his eyes as he felt that his must needs be before hers. He approached her more closely, and went on with increasing energy—

“I am not inconstant; it is now that I prove my constancy to what I have loved always—to the truth and to the divine ideal for whose sake I have been chasing shadows till now. It is the shadows that have passed away and left the true light, which there is no mistaking. Marie, you blaspheme yourself when you say what you said just now. If I have lost my life, do you restore it; and I swear to you, even for your own sake, that you shall not restore it to me in vain. You are already great, I know, and I am less than nothing; but you are free, thank God! and if you will give me hope, you shall see how worthy of you I shall, I must become. Dearest Marie! I will live for you, who represent to me all that is true and beautiful; and life for you must needs be such as you would have me live. You know me too well, Marie, for you not to understand me. Have we not been, are we not, friends? And I will make no further claim till I have proved that I am able to be what you would have me be. But hope you must give me. That will be every thing—and if it fails, one can but die at last; and meanwhile—but you will, will you not? It is for your sake—not only for my own—”

Marie (thunderstruck). “*Mon Dieu!*”

Like the first trembling gleam of lightning that announces at once to the fevered earth the reason of the vague and heavy restlessness that has been weighing upon its life during the sultry hours that the sun should by right have made full of energy and gladness, so, all at once, rushed through Marie the sudden consciousness of the real nature of the fever that had been wearing her for so long. The storm that had been more and more closely, day by day and hour by hour, gathering within and about her for so many weeks, had at last broken, and had torn away the mist that had hitherto hidden her even from her own eyes. The clouds, pregnant with the fullness of a first passion, had been long ripe for bursting, and had needed but a touch, a word, to set free the storm with which they were charged. And now, without a warning, that word had come. For one instant her whole soul rushed out to meet the soul which, like her own, had been so long seeking in vain for its fellow-spirit, and deluding itself, in the eagerness of search, with mocking phantasms of the reality. But the tumultuous joy of the sudden revelation which to a pure soul is nothing less than a new birth, was as evanescent as it was intense; and, like the lightning which it had resembled in its sudden brightness, left the night that it had momentari-

ly illuminated darker than before. Hitherto she had been asleep; and there is but little difference between the effect of light and of darkness to sleeping eyes. But now she had at last awoke; and it is to waking eyes that the darkness of the night is darkness indeed.

But Felix felt only the sympathy of joy, and was beyond the pale of the reaction.

"Marie," he went on earnestly, "I can not speak now in the common words of common love. It is my heart that is speaking to you—my real heart, that has never spoken until now. What is the need of words? You can understand all that I would say—if you will."

"O God!" she cried out, far less to him than into the night that had once more fallen upon her; "and must I ruin this man also? And yet—he loves me—he loves me!"

"Yes, he does love you! Thanks, dearest Marie—you have read my heart indeed. Yes—he loves you with perfect love—"

Something in her face made him pause. How long he waited in eager silence, perceiving but not comprehending the blank despair that held her incapable of struggling against destiny by a word or gesture, it would be impossible to say. To him his single, uncomplicated impulse made the time seem like a single moment; to her, with her crowd of recollections, of regrets, and of present emotions, it seemed like an hour. A drowning man, it is said, finds time in the instant of despair which precedes unconsciousness to live his whole life over again, year by year, day by day, detail by detail; and so it was now with her. But at last, with a visible effort, she found strength to speak.

"Go," she said, "I can not answer you. Go at once—forever." And then, after another long pause, and suddenly holding out her hand, "*Adieu*, dearest friend!"

He took her hand with both his own, and held it there. "You can not answer me!"

She tried to recover it, but he would not let it go. "*Adieu*!" she repeated; but this, he felt, was not the answer of her heart.

"No, Marie," he said; "you must either give me hope, or you must tell me that I have been trusting to nothing more than another dream."

"I can tell you nothing, except—go!"

"You can not love me? You can not save me?"

"No—I can not—"

"Marie," he interrupted her passionately, "this is not how you would answer me if you cared nothing about me. I have been blind enough in some things, God knows; but love such as mine is for you makes one see. If you can not read my heart I can read yours; and in yours I read any thing but your words. Why can not you love me? One whose whole life, and more than life, is at stake has a right to know."

She forced herself to speak with a spirit that she was far from feeling—that, indeed, was far from natural to her. He was right when he told her that had she cared nothing about him it was not so that she would have answered him. "There are some things that can not be told. I can not be more to you than I am—if I can not what is that to you?"

If I love thee, what is that to thee? Yes; but that is the self-contained love of angels—not

of a human soul that hungers after the love that it bestows.

"What is that to me? Do you refuse me, my life when I implore it of you, and refuse to tell me why? is that nothing? Do you show me the light and refuse to let me enter in? Do you make me promise and refuse to allow me to perform?"

"If you knew—"

"Ah!" he went on, with a sudden bitterness. "I will believe you. I will believe that you can not love me—so be it, if it must be so. But—"

"I implore you, ask me no more."

"On one condition. Swear to me that our friendship has been a mere pastime—that sympathy is but a word—that you are careless whether I live or die—"

"Felix!"

"Yes—whether I live or die. It is nothing less. Have you not yourself taught me what life means? Swear at least that you do not love me—"

"And you will believe me?"

"You will swear it? Marie—you dare not."

"I swear to you that I can never, never be more to you than I am now—than I have been always."

"Then I am absolved from my promise. You have not sworn that you do not love. I do ask you more."

All her false courage, all her pretense of strength, were swept away, at last in a passion of sincerity. The lightning was followed by the storm.

"Ah, Felix, have mercy! You know not what you are doing."

"Marie, you can not deceive me! You do love me, say what you will! Do I not read your heart as plainly, ten times as plainly, as you read mine? And if you love me, why are you ashamed, as though love were a sin?"

"O God, why can not I feign—why can not I be strong—why must I sin? Felix—if you love me—"

"If I love you!"

"If you love me—leave me."

"In God's name, Marie, what mystery is this? Why should you wish to feign? Why should you be weak? What sin lies in loving honestly and truly? Do you not trust me? Are you afraid of your own heart?"

Afraid of her own heart! It was true, and she knew her own fear and her own weakness only too well. It was so weak that it had already yielded; it was so weak that she, with all her strength, great as it was, felt that she was unfit, unaided, to guard it for a moment more. She flung herself on her knees before him and grasped his hand in a passion of supplication.

"There!" she exclaimed. "Do you believe me now when I say Go?"

The voice and face of Felix grew stern. "Do you love me, Marie? That is the only question between us. I have a right to know. And if you love me I will not go."

"You do not, can not love me as I—Do you not see how you make me humiliate myself? Ah, if you really loved me you would understand! Do you think it is out of caprice that I implore you to save me from my own heart—"

He stepped back suddenly, and regarded her intently. "Marie," he began.

But he could not continue in such a tone. With equal suddenness he raised her from where she knelt and pressed her passionately to his breast. He at least had nothing to conceal, and was free to obey what his heart bade him. "Ah, I understand!" he exclaimed, joyfully. "But you love me! That is all I care to know." The two souls had met at last.

For long she rested upon the place that by right, though not by law, was now hers without making an effort to move. But, omnipotent as the passion of a strong nature may appear, there is one citadel in every truly pure nature that it is powerless to conquer. The effort, though it came late, came at last.

She broke from him with all her strength. "Oh, for my sake, for God's sake, go! May He pardon me—may He protect you. Felix, you must leave me—there, you know my heart now!"

"Leave you, my dearest? Yes—but to return!"

"No—never to return! Thank God for your love, Felix—there is no sin in being loved! And you shall never be the worse for mine. For I do love you, though not in the way you would have me. Do all things that are worthy of you—do them for my sake if you will, if that will aid you. Your love has made me very happy, and one day we will be friends again. Till then—adieu! I will pray for you always. And do not you forget to pray to One who can aid you more than I."

"Marie—you have some secret that you fear to tell me. Do you trust me so little as to think I would not trust you—that I would seek to know any thing that it would give you pain to tell unless that I might remove the pain? Let the past be the past to you as well as to me. What is the past to either of us now?"

"And suppose—" she began, with difficulty.

"Suppose nothing—but that we love each other."

"When to love you is a sin?"

"A sin? In God's name what can you mean?"

"I must not tell."

"And why?"

"Felix! It is true that I have a secret—that I have been living a lie. And the secret is not my own."

"And have I no claim? Marie, I am waiting for my answer—for my sentence of life or death. I must know what is the barrier that stands between you and me."

What was she to do? One thing only—to sacrifice all things, at any cost, for him she loved. If that be in reality sometimes a sin, there is surely no true woman to whom it would, under any circumstances, wear a sinful guise. However she might suffer, however much he who had a legal right to her self-sacrifice might have reason to condemn her, Felix had a right to her consideration founded upon a higher law than that made by men. It is true that she hesitated for long, and that when she did speak it was from no mere impulse.

"You are right," she said at last, suddenly. "I must not let you suffer." And then, more slowly, and with a last effort of weakness, she added, "Now, Felix—dearest friend!—you will help to save me now, I know. Yes—I love you, Felix!—and I am a wife!"

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN we read of the grosser and less subtle forms of crime and sin in distant ages and in distant lands, they seem to us in no wise extraordinary, or even so much out of the probable course of things as to need being accounted for. But when, as they occasionally will, they make their appearance in our midst, in our own civilized country and time, we are astonished as if in sight of the impossible. We go on for the most part in so even a groove that we talk and think as though hate and envy and unscrupulous selfishness were extinct; or, at least, as though they were so curbed and restrained by our modern social system as to be rendered, among persons of position and education, incapable of taking their old-fashioned course freely and blindly. When we are bound to recognize facts—when we are forced by them to see that the world, the flesh, and the devil still contrive to hold their own in spite of the feeble circle of dikes and dams with which we strive to keep our level plains safe from the untamable sea outside—we have to resort to theories of lunacy; or if these, as is often the case, will not hold, to confess, if we are in an unusually modest mood, that our psychology is baffled.

But no; even as those who cross the sea change only the sky above them and not their own souls, so it is not human nature that changes; it is only places and times. All that man has done, man may do, in a far truer sense than that in which the proverb is usually employed: and as long as the passions of men endure, so long will endure the forms taken by their passions. It is not only in the Litany that malice will follow hard upon the heels of hatred, even in the hearts of sane men.

Warden had met Alice Raymond only the night before, and had made, as it seemed to him, good way. Whether he had or not, is another matter. He had never mixed much with women, and was not one of the initiated in the mysteries of ball-rooms; and so his vanity was easily gratified by nothings. He himself never did or said any thing without a motive; and so he was not one to understand barren likings and flirtations that were honestly meant to be understood as pastime. Besides, he was not so genuinely in love with Miss Raymond for her own sake as to possess in himself and in his own feelings that infallible test whereby a man knows by instinct whether he is loved or no. He only knew that, for his own part, it was not a mere flirtation that he was carrying on with her. She must, he was assured, see what his feelings were towards her, and what with gratified vanity, ambition, self-interest, and desire of possession, it was not in his heart to draw back. He had set his heart upon this thing, even as he had formerly set it upon his fellowship; and it had always been his way where he had set his heart to set his hand. Any way, the fox could not tear himself away from the sight of the grapes, for all that they were to all appearance so far out of his reach! nor did he even console himself by calling them sour. But were they really out of his reach? What was the good of having brains and of knowing how to turn them to good account if he was to be balked by the mere passive existence of a girl like Marie, who had now succeeded in proving her stupidity to the full, if indeed any,

thing had been wanting to prove it before? If he had but lived in the good old times of the water of Saint Nicholas! He was conscious of the very thought, and did not shrink from it.

Such a line of speculation may possibly be unusual; but it did not, at all events to him, seem to be so very horrible or so very unnatural when it first took the shape of an actual possibility. On the contrary, it carried with it that sort of pleasure which the first suggestion of something that may be done as well as dreamed of must always carry to a man of strong will, weak imagination, and few scruples: to a man, that is to say, whose nature leads him to take the shortest and most obvious road to the attainment of any given purpose, and whose eyes can see clearly but one thing at a time. It was at first a thought for Warden to caress and to play with as he sat over his breakfast preparing leisurely for the calls of the new day that, like every day, came to fix indelibly the result of the hours of candle-light and of darkness that had gone before. What was there in itself horrible in the thought? It was that of Marie lying, as sooner or later she must come to lie, silent and unconscious beneath the ground, out of the way of all evil, of all sorrow, of all trouble, and—of Mark Warden. He recalled to mind, with a sort of approving appreciation, that hopeless summing up of all human things that he had read in the "*Cedipus Colonius*," "Surely the best thing for a man is not to be born; but, being born, the next best thing for him is to die as soon as he may." He had got into a very dangerous region of speculation indeed, in which consequences seem confused and unreal in the overwhelming shadow thrown upon them by the immediate desire of self-gratification. He saw in Marie an evil spirit whom he had raised in a moment of folly, and who must be got rid of somehow, if not anyhow; and the purely moral means, now tried without result, had, in his practical mind, more than begun to blend with the physical, as is the way with men like him.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to define the limit between desire and determination—the point at which one ends and the other begins. And yet there must be some moment when the murderer in heart becomes so conscious of his desire that he consciously takes means to bring about its fulfillment. Were it not that one knows it to be the case, it would be impossible to conceive of the possibility of murder—to call things by their right names—so taking possession of a man's soul that the first actual step taken in accordance with such an idea—however unconsciously taken—should fail to drive away the thought at once, utterly and forever. But that it does sometimes fail is only too certain; and the crisis of this undefinable limit had now been reached by Mark Warden. Nor are chances and omens ever absent in such cases. The first book upon which he laid his hand, apparently by instinct, was an old work upon medical jurisprudence that happened to form part of his legal library. He opened it mechanically, and turned its leaves. He did not intend to do any thing—let that be understood clearly; but he none the less began to call to mind all that in the course of his life he had happened to hear of the nature of poisons and of the difference of their several effects: how they acted upon the frame, and to

what extent they left their traces upon it. There was matter and to spare for his meditation in that cold-blooded judicial treatise which changed into a collection of dry bones the fearful list of tragedies that had closed with the gallows. The gallows! yes, that had been the end of all these. But the tragedies upon which no sudden curtain had fallen—where were they? What had been their *dénouement*? That there were such he was convinced. Every body in the world is not ignorant or stupid; and it is notorious that it is invariably through the ignorance or stupidity of the slayer that foul deaths are brought to light. He, at least, if it should become necessary to direct chance in the way it should go, would not fail by reason of stupidity or ignorance. Nor did what met his eye as he turned the pages tend to diminish his self-confidence.

To him, in the state of mind in which he now was, such reading had the interest of nothing short of fascination. He felt, as his eye began to dwell longer and more systematically upon his book, as though he were entering into a new world in which it is the one object of human life to kill one's fellow-creatures without being found out, even as to a layman who reads a more purely medical treatise the disease of which it treats assumes at last such prodigious proportions as to seem as if it were the normal and proper condition of the human race, in which he also must of necessity be a sharer. And the more Warden read, the more lost in amazement he became at the bungling fashion in which all who had been discovered had, as it were with their own hands, knotted the rope round their own necks. "Murder will out," people say; but he could not help seeing that in point of fact it is the murderer himself who will out with it; that a man who quietly took the ordinary pains which he would take in any ordinary action of his life need scarcely be suspected unless he pleased. And then he thought, as a natural consequence, how many of those who are not suspected, whom the world honors, who are without scruples, and who profit by death every day—how many of these have taken the control of chance into their own hands? And why should I be more scrupulous than other men, when it is all so easy? It was not even as though a life like that of Marie would be missed or thought of, or would make a void in the ocean of society of the smallest appreciable kind for an appreciable instant. Besides himself, to whom could it matter whether she lived or died?

But where, it may be asked, was conscience all this while? Well, conscience was in the condition in which it usually is when there is most need for it to act—that is to say, fast asleep. For at the birth of Cain, says a certain Rabbi, the two angels, one good and one evil, that attended upon him as upon every man, wearied beforehand of the prospect of the long watch which they would have to keep over one another, and which would prevent them from enjoying a moment's repose for little short of a thousand years, entered into a solemn compact with each other that they would divide the watch—that one should wake before deeds were committed, the other after them. But the question arose which watch should belong wholly to the good and which wholly to the evil. The latter, having the craft of the serpent, obtained the first by bribe of allowing his rival double power

deeds were done; and hence it is that, in the generation of Cain, conscience warns in the shape of a dim and doubtful dream, and wakes, not to warn as conscience, but to punish as remorse.

Warden had never, as some people do who would not without sentimental remorse injure so much as a flea, amused himself with speculating as to how he should go to work were he bent upon taking human life without a chance of discovery. He never amused himself with speculations at all; those in which he indulged had always some practical end, nor could he otherwise conceive of any one's indulging his fancy in so useless a way. With him, to entertain an idea meant to carry it out; and mental habits of this nature are almost omnipotent. Was there not—was then the next stage in his present course of speculation—in all that world in which his mind was now roaming at large some one drug which would answer the purpose? Was it true, as he had heard his father say, that aconitine, for instance, if that was the name, would kill with certainty and with speed—would imitate the natural symptoms of probable disease, and leave no trace of itself behind? As a matter of curiosity, he searched the pages of his book, but could find no mention of it. Was it, then, merely a piece of medical superstition, or was it that it had never found its way into courts of justice simply because it was so safe and so sure? If there were such a drug, whatever its name might be, it must have been used: it was not likely to be known to Dr. Warden of Denethorp alone. This very effort of memory—for when he had heard the name he had let it slip by as a piece of useless knowledge unprofitable to him in the schools—had the effect of still more closely fixing and intensifying his thoughts and of giving them a still more certain direction in their dangerous path.

He was thus engaged, like some necromancer, searching his books for some more potent spell to lay the fiend whom he had raised in the innocent form of Marie, when his ears were startled by the fall of a letter from the slit in the outer door of his chambers upon the floor of the passage. He hastily closed the volume, put it back in its place with a hurry for which he did not seek to account, and then picked up the letter, which was directed to him in a handwriting which he knew only too well, and which made him tear it open nervously. After all, it was not even for Mark Warden to lay aside such a dream-book as he had chosen with a steady hand.

"MY DEAR FRIEND"—it began—"When I last saw you—the last time I shall ever see you—you must have thought me very stupid. I confess it; and am sorry that I did not understand better what you meant. Do not be afraid. When you receive this I shall be where I shall trouble you and be in your way no more. Why, indeed, should I care to live, when my life is of service to none, and is only an injury to you?"

"My dear Mark—forgive my calling you so for the last time—for you have been very dear to me—how can I ever pardon myself, even if you can pardon me, for having been a drag upon you for so long? Believe me it was unknowingly. I always lived and worked for you, and you only, ever since that morning when I came to you at B—! what a child I was then!—and my only *thought has been how I could aid you and be as*

good a wife as I could to you till the time came which is never to come. And how could I tell that I was in your way unless you told me so? Thank you for having told me so now—it is a kindness more than I can say. It would have been dreadful indeed to have found it out too late.

"Do not think I am complaining; I am only trying to do what is right by you, as I have always tried to do. What your career may be henceforth when you are freed from me I shall never know. I pray for my soul that it may be prosperous—that you may be happy. Only—let me implore you with my last words—let your life be true and honest, as I know that it will be brave and strong. It was not your fault, dear Mark, that we were obliged to deceive the world; but even so our deception, innocent and necessary as it was, has been the cause of all the unhappiness that I have caused you. Perhaps had we been brave enough to despise the world as it ought to be despised, and to have followed our own hearts, we might even by now have been to each other what we once wished to be—for you wished it once, I know; and I am sure that had you thought fit to trust me, and had been able, I should not have been unworthy of your trust. And—though I do not wish to stand in your way any more—I may at least ask you—if you do not understand me, so much the better—to climb the hill that is before you as a man should; not to stoop to aid which is unworthy of any man, and above all, of you. A strong and true heart is worth all the wealth in the world.

"I should like to be able to say more to you—but I can not; and there is no need, now that I am nothing to you any more. Good-bye, my dear friend—for such I know you would still be if you could; and you have always been kind to me—far more kind and considerate than I deserved. I have never heard from you a harsh word; and it was not your fault that the end had to come. You never had the chance of learning to love me; and so perhaps it has been best. Good-bye, once more; do not quite forget me—think sometimes of your dead first love, who would have been so good to you if she had only known how, and who will pray for you always.

"For the last time, good-bye. God bless you always, and bring us both to meet again in Him.
"MARIE."

Whether the train of thought in which he had been absorbed for the last hour or two had been nothing more than a vague and passing dream, or whether it was of a nature to ripen into actual deed, can not be told. Such fancies are seeds which, though noxious, are oftenest barren; and so they might have proved with him. But they were so far in a way to promise blossom, if not fruit, that the reading of this letter gave him a shock such as a growing weed may, for the sake of comparison, be supposed to undergo when suddenly torn up by roots which it has extended far and firmly into the ground. Barren as such dreams for the most part prove, their fruit is after all not seldom gathered; and its harvest must always have been preceded by some such dreams as these. But, seeing that he had stopped at the sowing, let him have the benefit of any possible doubt. The fulfillment of his wish—for to the formation of a wish, at all events, he had come—

is almost too horrible to conceive; and it would be too horrible, not almost, but altogether, did not the history of the most desperate of all crimes amply prove that such wishes have been fulfilled very often indeed—that the father of the thought is very likely to be the father of the deed also. Of course, with regard to such a question, every one must be left to form his own opinion, according to his own experience of human nature. Only it is very certain that, had Warden been born in some Italian city some very few hundreds of years ago, Messer Marco would not have been troubled long with Donna Marie; and that, however much place and time may vary, human nature is a thing that does not change.

He read and re-read the letter, however, precisely in the way that one would expect from a man of his nature, for men like him do not afford psychological surprises. He had not the imagination that was required to read the deep pathos that lay beneath the surface of the forced and lifeless words, or to connect himself, the Mark Warden of the present, with the boy of five years ago. One must be something of a poet to remember not only one's childhood, but one's youth also; and Mark, when he married, had been under his one short spell of real youth which had been over long ago, and he was no poet to recall its shadow when its substance had gone forever. So it was not to be expected of him that he should realize in his memory the time when he had loved the girl who had developed into a woman even more rapidly than he into a man.

But though the heart of such a man is proof against subtle touches, it need not be callous to gross blows; and it is due to him to say that the first effect of the letter was to wake him from his dream as if from a nightmare. He felt now like a necromancer indeed, or rather like the servant of a necromancer, who, ignorantly playing with his master's tools, has crossed the step that divides guilt imagined from guilt done. The letter could have but one interpretation. Marie might at that very moment be lying dead—dead for him, and, as he seemed to feel, dead by him. Could evil wishes travel with such lightning speed? Were they, indeed, so fatal? Conscience, when it does wake, scorns coincidences, and turns into a superstitious self-accuser the most practical of men. Had he actually slain her with his own hand, he would not have felt otherwise than he felt now.

But this was in the actual moment of waking, before reason, which always wakes the last, had woken also.

He read the letter again; and its meaning stared him full in the face, incredible as it still seemed to him. It could but have that one meaning, which he feared to recognize. Or was it, after all, only a ruse to alarm him—a woman's trick—a last resource to test him, if not to draw him back? But even he, devoid of imagination as he was, knew Marie well enough to reject such a suggestion as being more incredible than the other.

But there might be time to save her. It is far more easy for people to talk of death than to act as they talk. At all events, he must satisfy himself as to what she did really mean. He placed the letter in his pocket, and had put on his hat, and was turning the handle of the door, when something restrained him.

Suppose she were dead or dying, what then? He could not save her. And it was very possible that he should only succeed in mixing himself up with a very disagreeable affair, without the least necessity for so doing. No one knew of his connection with her; and that being the case, the best thing that he could do would be to ignore it altogether. Suppose, on the other hand, she were still living? In that case it was clear that the letter contained but an idle threat, after all; and it would never do for him, by allowing her ruse to succeed, to put himself hopelessly in the wrong. She must be made to see that he was in earnest, and that she could not bring him back to her side by so vulgar an artifice as a threat of suicide.

Whether this were so or not, a very little while would show. On the whole, however, he was of opinion that the letter contained no mere threat, but was evidence of an impulse that had settled into a fixed determination. Its whole tone, the absence of studied effect, brought him to the same conclusion. At all events, he might safely feel that she would trouble him no more; and if so, was he answerable for any thing that she might choose to do? Supposing that she had never written to him, not a shadow of responsibility would have been upon him, and why should he place himself deliberately in a worse position now? It would be ungrateful to his star, which had now, as it seemed, so wonderfully freed him from the one burden of his life without obliging him to take the control of destiny into his own hands. The feeling of horror which the first perusal of the letter had given, gradually, as his spirits rose under the influence of relief, melted into one of positive satisfaction with himself for having resisted temptation. It was not long before he felt like a man who, upon the eve of marriage, has unexpectedly been disburdened of an inconvenient mistress. If he could only feel quite sure that she was actually no more, he would have been able, he flattered himself, to dismiss her from his mind altogether. For the first time the bugbear thought of, "If it were not for Marie!" might pass out of his mind. It was so great a relief as to amount to the same kind of discomfort as that which a man feels when he suddenly misses some dull chronic pain that has become so much a part of himself that when it first leaves him he can not at first quite recognize himself without it.

For, after all, whether alive or dead, it was plain that she would trouble him no more—that was certain. There was really no need for him to fly to the idea of suicide, obvious as it was upon the face of the letter. He might fairly assume another theory by way of excuse for inactivity.

"Well," he chose to think to himself—and, from his own point of view, the idea was not by any means very wild—"people never do what they don't want to do. I thought she could not have been so stupid as she seemed; and so she has pleased herself and saved her credit as well. I dare say, wherever she may be, her friend the fiddler is not far off."

But though he thus spoke to himself, he knew very well what he really believed in the matter, and what he wished in his soul to be true.

If he could but have seen her when those few commonplace words were wrung from depths of

heart too deep to express themselves in any words that were not weak and poor!

When her lover, whom she now knew only too certainly that she loved with what was, in truth, her first real love, and with as much purity as if she had been as little a wife in law as in fact, had left her in a condition such as, seeing that the blossom of passion in such cases is always luxuriant in proportion to the hopelessness of its ever coming to its natural fruit, it would be better not to attempt to describe, the state of reaction in which he had found her returned with tenfold intensity. Unfortunately—for it was unfortunate for once—Marie was any thing but a hysterical subject, while her heart itself was far too sound and healthy to give her the relief of temporary unconsciousness. But some relief her spirit must have; and though she had wept already in the presence of her cousin, the relief came once more in tears. But the tears evoked by words of kindness are very different to those that came to her now.

Dry-eyed sorrow is said to be the worst of any; and so it is of all sorrows save one. The "summer tempest" of tears may save from death or worse, while a drought may do worse than slay. But with the summer tempest must not be confounded the storm in which the tears do not freshen and soothe the fevered ground, but scorch and scald; with which is not mingled the heaving of sobs, but the tense pain which seems as though it must end in strangulation; by which the brain does not seem eased of a load, but is changed into one leaden, aching pain, which excludes thought and reason and hope and memory, and all things but passive despair. It is with such tears as these that Niobe wept herself to stone.

But he did not see her, so that to him this true agony of soul, made up as much of self-accusation as of any thing else, was inconceivable. And so alone, and utterly incapable of the exercise of volition or conscious thought, she was left to seek for herself the safety for which she instinctively longed.

CHAPTER VII.

WARDEN carefully folded up the letter and placed it in his pocket. He was fond of ruling circumstances; but at present there was nothing for him to do but to remain passive, and to let circumstances take care of themselves. Satisfied with the present aspect of things, he must carefully avoid consciously drawing from them the conclusions that in his heart he was glad and relieved to be able to draw, for his own conscience's sake. So that he might, as far as possible, separate himself from his hopes, and make them seem, even to himself, altogether external matters with which he had nothing to do, he sat down resolutely to read, and actually succeeded in holding his book resolutely before him. It seemed to him, as it has seemed to so many, besides the ostrich, under like circumstances, that, by shutting his eyes to Marie's fate, he thereby wholly disconnected himself from it, and from all responsibility in connection with it; that by ignoring her letter he put himself in the position in which he would have been had it never been written at all. But yet, for the first time in his life, his thoughts were

really engaged in one thing, while he was outwardly engaged with something entirely different. Every sound that he heard upon the stairs of the busy staircase on which he lived seemed to him to mean something—to be the forerunner of news, impossible as he knew it to be that he could hear any news indirectly, and even at third hand.

He was thus absorbed in making believe to be at ease, while he was, in fact, stretched upon the rack of suspense—that is to say, he was in a state of mind that he especially despised, holding, as he did fully, that all purposeless and unprofitable thinking, especially when it took the form of doubting and dreaming, was sheer waste of time—when he was disturbed and startled by the thunder that he recognized as that which was wont to herald the entrance of Dick Barton.

But this with him was altogether a morning of self-contradiction. The usually unwelcome sound was for once not unwelcome; it was a relief to be disturbed, no matter who the visitor might be. What he really wanted was to forget Marie altogether, until her fate should prove itself beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Barton was looking not quite so much out at elbows as usual; for such men as he flourish in Cursor Street as in their native air, and thrive upon what is altogether prostrating to men like Hugh Lester.

"Why, Barton—good-morning," he said, more genially than usual, as he laid down his book.

"*Ére es coracas!*" Good-morning indeed! Why, I've just dropped in to wish you good-night. I say," he went on, throwing himself luxuriously into the arm-chair just vacated by Warden, which groaned a protest under the unaccustomed weight, "guess where I'm come from this time—a place you'll never see the inside of, any more than you will of Elysium; not that they're the same thing by any means—rather the other way. Old Slo is not exactly a Jupiter, except in having his own way; though Miss Rachel has a very fair notion of playing Hebe—except in the matter of perpetual youth. You never heard of old Slo or Miss Rachel? Well, you don't know what you lose, you respectable men. You have never seen the hookedest proboscis or the Iscariotest locks in all creation."

"I am quite content to be without that pleasure, I assure you."

"Well—they have their faults. For one thing, they are much more apt to welcome the coming—as long as he has a stray half-crown—than to speed the parting guest—when he hasn't; and for my society they have always shown a peculiar partiality. However, I am eating the crust of liberty once more, as you see. *Quo me quando rapit tempestas, deferor hospes*—and now I'm yours. Don't look so frightened, though. I've got enough to buy my own crust to-day; and to-morrow one can but return to durance vile, tempered by Champagne still viler. But to go back to our flocks, as a friend of ours would put it pastorally. I'm not going to ask you even for half a crown; but have you such a thing about you as a stray fifty guineas?"

"The devil!"

"What! the immaculate Mark Warden swearing?"

"Why, my good fellow—"

"Why, what's fifty guineas to you? Besides, you'll be glad enough when I tell you with whom

I have been conversing in the Elysian plains. Yes, I've been keeping the best of company, I assure you; where I come from—no less a being than an ex-M.P."

"What! with Lester? You don't mean to say—"

"Yes. I tumble across most people in time. But I don't wonder you stare all the same. I don't; but then I've seen too many things to stare at any of them, and have arrived at a state of *ataraxia*, which, by-the-way, proves the advice to Numicius to be wrong. Still, if any of the men of our time could have seen Lester in the same boat with Dick Barton! It's wonderful, though, how being down in the world brings out a man's good points. He really isn't a bad fellow, only he's profoundly green, and knows the world about as well as he knows his Horace—just enough not to make a false quantity or do a dirty thing."

"And is it from him—do you mean he asked you to apply to me?"

"He? No. Didn't I as much as say just now that he was a gentleman, and therefore an ass, in all but thickness of skin?"

"Then what is it you expect me to do?"

"The devil! What does a man expect himself to do when the tables are turned and his friend is in want of a note or two?"

"I'm very sorry indeed to hear this about Lester."

"And the fifty guineas?"

"Why, you talk as if fifty guineas were the same as fifty pence."

"You haven't got so much, you mean?"

"I certainly have not."

"Well, that doesn't matter. You can join in a bill, I suppose?"

"I never join in bills, on principle. Besides, you don't seem to know the circumstances."

"Oh, circumstances be damned—and principle too. Who cares for circumstances? Here's a young fellow dropped by his natural relations, and not, I should say, a good hand at falling on his natural legs. Well, granted he's been ass enough to quarrel with his bread-and-butter, better men do that every day."

"Barton, I'm very sorry, as I said. But you must know that I haven't a penny more than I know what to do with—besides, I have"—"other claims," he was going to add, but stopped. "And if I could do any thing," he went on, "still a man must accept the position into which he has put himself by his own fault and with his eyes wide open, as Lester has done. Besides, I and he have never been the friends you seem to think. We scarcely knew each other at Cambridge, and since then I have been useful to him, as a matter of business, and that is all. Still, of course, if I could help him I would—but this way of helping him would be childish; and not only childish, but wrong on every principle."

"What! you won't, then?"

"Once more, I'm very sorry. But it is always best to say what one means at once. No."

Barton started from his seat. "Then—I'm damned if I ever speak to you again."

Warden knew how to be angry on occasions. "The punishment will not be greater than I can bear, I assure you," he said, in answer.

"Cad!" exclaimed Barton, with angry contempt, and stalked out of the room.

"Thank Heaven for that riddance, at all

events," thought Warden to himself. Of course he had been quite right not to throw away his money upon Lester, or to be tempted from his wholesome principle of not putting his name to bills: his refusal to do either did not trouble him in the least, and to say no was always so easy a thing to him that he did not even feel vain, as many men with less moral courage would have done, of his firmness in the matter. And if the thought had troubled him, the fact of his having at last fairly succeeded in quarrelling with his Old Man of the Sea would have been ample compensation. His mind having been thus not unpleasantly excited, he turned once more to the page in the perusal of which he had been interrupted, and this time worked away with only very little less energy than usual till it was time to prepare himself for the party in the evening at which he was engaged to be present, and where, of course, he expected to meet the lady of his love once more. Then, with no less care and attention than he bestowed upon what are usually, but most often wrongly, considered the more important concerns of life, he dressed himself to resume the thread of his own second and certainly more important life, and dismissed from his mind all thought of the branch of the law of contracts which had been the ostensible subject of his day's study. He was by no means one of that class of students who are haunted during a waltz by the ghosts of the Six Carpenters, or whose one idea of beginning a conversation is contained in the words "A agrees with B."

And not only was Miss Raymond present, with her smile and her blue eyes, and the hair that was beginning to draw him into its innocent net for the sake of the unconscious angler herself, as well as for that of the metal of which it was woven, but Miss Clare also, to whom society was every day becoming more and more a necessary stimulant. It may seem strange that a series of evening parties should have the effect of a stimulant upon any one; but the sight of even the affectation of pleasure is exciting to one who has never made acquaintance with its reality in any form.

It was not so that Warden regarded it. He could scarcely be said to have enjoyed the details of the society into which he was now making such good way, any more than he could be said to enjoy the differential calculus or the law of contracts itself. But it was all in his day's work, and so he never suffered himself to be bored: the result of which was that he bored no one. On what precise footing he stood it would be hard to say, seeing that he was neither a man of great fortune, nor a famous traveller, nor a man of title, nor a dancing man, nor a singing man, nor a wit. But then, whatever his footing was, it was thus rendered all the more secure by the fact of his having nothing to lose. He could not well become poorer; he could not be expected to dance or sing, so that he was superior to the risks of gout and hoarseness; he was not likely to make enemies by his tongue, as wits do, and he was in no fear of being cast into the shade by the next new-comer from Lake Tchad or Cape Lopatka. The truth is, that to enter what is called society, and to hold one's own in it successfully, demands, on the part of a man who stands alone, only three things—a good coat, a pair of gloves, and the power of holding his tongue.

The great and safe rule is *audi, vide, tace*; and a man is called agreeable not by reason of what he says, but by reason of what he does not say. But if in addition to these three requisites he has the power of talking unobtrusively when there is occasion, then, so long as he carefully refrains from saying a single word that the hearer can remember for a single second after it is spoken, he can go where he will, and do almost any thing that he pleases. He will not often be talked about, indeed, but he will be missed; and when he is mentioned, it will be with the sincere praise of those who are grateful beyond measure to any one who will just abstain from boring them, as wits and lions are apt to do. After all, a prolonged roar is scarcely less fatiguing and wearisome than a bray, and is much more alarming. Such a man will not, of course, obtain a success of the very first order; but he will be accepted as a perfectly gentlemanly and agreeable fellow, and will be credited with all the good qualities which, because he does not show them, interfere with the *métier* of no one. The great mistake by which men with far better introductions and social qualities than Mark Warden lose their chance, is that of trying to make themselves agreeable; for to try and to fail is to be lost forever, while to try and to succeed is only to make more foes than friends.

But still, though the requisites are few, to make proper use of them is by no means such an easy matter. It demands a watchful eye, a steady hand, a cool head, and a genius for self-restraint, in order that the aspirant for social honor may make no false step, and lose no opportunity. In a word, it demands Tact—a comprehensive quality in which Warden showed signs of ere long becoming a perfect proficient. He showed great tact, for instance, on this occasion, by not at once devoting himself to Miss Raymond, while he was what some uncharitable people might call obsequiously attentive to Miss Clare. To make a point of preferring the old to the young is in itself sufficiently graceful; and not only is it graceful in itself, especially on the part of a young man, in whom it may be supposed to imply some exercise of self-denial, but it is very likely indeed to have its reward. To pay court to the mother is by no means a bad way of paying court to the daughter; and it is a still better way of paying court to the daughter's fortune. It is true that such a relation did not exist in this case; but then Miss Raymond was so unselfish and so grateful for attentions paid to her old friend, that Warden by this means probably made much better way in her good graces than if he had hung about her for the whole of an evening. Had she only had, indeed, a little more selfishness in her, in the shape of a little more intensity of nature, she would have been a heroine with whom not Mark Warden only, but the reader of this also, would have been in love. As it was, however, she was far too good to take rank as a heroine.

But these two were by no means the only noteworthy people present when Warden arrived. It was a very grand party indeed—one of those which would supply a list of guests to the "Morning Post" of at least half a column in length. Such half columns, however, are not interesting reading, except to a few strangely constituted *minds*; and though the "Trumpet" may afford

an occasional quotation, the "Court Circular" can scarcely be held to be worth transcribing at the best of times. Of course the presence of a royal duke can not be passed over in silence; but otherwise, from such a mob of titles as was there, it is impossible to choose. It was just such a gathering as the ordinary human creature would cheerfully give the whole length of both his ears to have seen but once in a lifetime; and it would have sent poor Lorry wild with excitement and wonder could she have supposed it possible that the "Mr. Warden" whose name crept in just before the "etc., etc.," with which the list closed, was her own brother Mark. She would have hung up the sheet of the paper in a frame in the drawing-room, and have made her ninety-nine prostrations before it every day.

Indeed it would have been the height of presumption on her brother's part had he at once made his way to Miss Raymond's side instead of patiently waiting his turn. She was at that moment the most envied of her sex in the room, for she had actually, without an effort, done what had hitherto been regarded as impossible. She had succeeded in making the young Earl of Farleigh, the great catch of that and of many other seasons, engage in something approaching to conversation with one who was neither a ballet-girl, an actress, nor even a foreigner. Even Warden, sensible man as he was, felt an uncomfortable feeling, which in a less sensible man would have been jealousy, when he saw her thus engaged. Tory as he professed to be in his politics, he was at that moment as real a Radical as Mr. Prescott himself.

Once more the great *prima donna* was singing, whom Angélique had not succeeded in driving from her throne. Miss Raymond was listening with all her ears; her companion, a feeble and rather worn-out-looking young man, with an affectedly foreign air, was looking languidly at the ceiling.

"Oh, is not that glorious?" exclaimed Miss Raymond, with real enthusiasm, and not as a bait for the titled connoisseur.

"Hm!" he answered, letting his eyes drop upon her from the ceiling for a moment. "Yes—*très-bien*. But you should have heard what's-her-name sing it in Venice. Were you ever in Venice?"

"Never. It must be very interesting."

"It is the most interesting place in the world. Why, when I was there last, there was a girl there who does the *pas de Boréas* better than Pucini, on my honor: and as for what's-her-name—ah! I wish you had heard her sing; but then English people are such asses. Don't you hate England, Miss Raymond?"

"It would be very ungrateful in me if I did."

"Why? Because you were born in it? I should say it was England ought to be grateful to you, then, not you to England. By Jove! I don't feel grateful to England at all. I never could see why a man should be bound to like a fog just because he happened to be born in November."

"And yet you are kind enough to come and look after us sometimes? I wonder at that, after you have seen the *pas de Boréas* and heard what's-her-name."

"Ah, Miss Raymond, do not taunt me with my misfortunes. I never was meant for an English peer. Nature intended me to be an Italian

impresario—I am sure of it. *Corpo d'un cane!* One might live one's own life if it weren't for one's confounded title and one's stake in the country, as they call it. Don't you hate the country, Miss Raymond? For my part, I like my steak in town."

"It is a pity one can not make exchanges. I dare say my friend Monsieur Prosper there would exchange places with your lordship with pleasure."

"He'd make a great mistake if he did. Ah, here he is—the lucky dog! What have you got in England now, Prosper? I'm fresh from *la bella Italia*, you know, where one drops before the age about what you call your theatres—pigsties, by Jove! And how are you? It's a long time since that big evening at Paris—when we came to such jolly grief, don't you remember? And how's Coralie and Delphine, and that other little thing, you know?"

Miss Raymond, who was not interested in the health of Coralie, or of Delphine, or even of the other little thing, hastily turned to speak to some one else. Monsieur Prosper bowed low.

"I am much honored by my lord's recollection. I am afraid there is not much going on. Your lordship sees—"

"Oh, damn my lordship! Why the devil can't you call me Signor Farlini? And why isn't there much going on? There ought to be. You fellows are not half up to your work! Papageno of Venice—he's the man! He's got the *Ranuzza*: of course you know the *Ranuzza*?"

"*Ranuzza*?"

"What!—you don't? By Jove! she's the finest singer in Europe—shakes on F sharp in altissimo, and has a compass of six octaves, at least. She'd astonish you rather. And then you talk of Catalani! I thought of bringing her over with me here, and I would have, too, only we quarrelled the night before I left. I wish you could hear her swear, Prosper—it's positively charming! But I think I must really take a house one of these days. I'd have Corbaccchione and Barbaggianni and the *Ranuzza*, of course; and one might have Catalani for the small *roles*—Papageno should conduct, and you should lead the orchestra. What do you think? We should rather astonish the town, shouldn't we?"

"Rather, my lord," said Prosper, dryly.

"And haven't you really got any thing new?"

"Shall I tell your lordship a secret? I have found a pearl of pearls—only she does not sing."

"Dance, does she? Well, she won't do the *pas de Borias* like the *Babbuina*—that's the name!—or I'll eat my head—not if she swears like *Ranuzza*."

"She's only a pianist, my lord. But it will be quite safe to believe in her. I mean her to be the first artist in the world before I have done with her, and to make people rave about fingers as much as they do about toes."

"Oh, damn your key-boards! I know—short and fat, isn't she, with a German name all consonants, and spectacles?"

"Not at all, my lord. She is young and pretty, is *ma petite Marie*, and one *raffoles* about her even now."

"Young and pretty? Ah, that's different. *Chi nasce bella nasce* any thing she pleases. But she isn't English, I hope?"

"She is French, my lord."

"Then she might do—if she takes an Italian name. Is she here to-night?"

"Not yet, my lord. But she will be immediately. It is past her time already—she ought to play the very next."

Marie had established that most dangerous of characters—a reputation for punctuality. If any other public performer had not appeared for an hour, or even for three hours after her time, or had even not appeared at all, no one would have wondered, far less been alarmed about her. But Marie was a subdivider of minutes; and if her fixed second passed without her appearing, something must inevitably have happened for which not even her milliner was of sufficient consequence to be held responsible. It had by this time become the fashion for people to expect to hear Marie Lefort, and her presence was almost necessary to give distinction to any party in which music professed to be a conspicuous element; so that her absence was missed, at all events, to the extent of making people comment upon it, which is perhaps the greatest extent to which any one can expect to be missed at all.

Prosper, for reasons of his own, perhaps not altogether unconnected with the presence of so distinguished a patron of the fine arts as Lord Farleigh, was particularly bent upon Marie's appearance on this particular evening; and when first half an hour and then an hour had passed by, and there was no sign of Mademoiselle Lefort, he went and spoke to Felix.

"How is it that Marie is not here?"

The heart of Felix gave a leap. "Was she to have come?"

"Of course. More than an hour ago. Have you seen her to-day?"

"Yes; for a little while."

"And she said nothing about this evening?"

"Nothing."

"She can not have forgotten it—she never forgets. It is not far—I wish you would take a coach and go to Berners Street. It will put me out terribly if she does not arrive."

This was his euphemism for "I hope there is nothing the matter with her."

Felix had his own reasons for a similar fear of a much stronger nature. It was any thing but an agreeable commission for him to undertake in itself, but his anxiety was sufficiently powerful to prevent his thinking about himself. So he left the house at once and hastened eastward.

CHAPTER VIII.

HE reached Berners Street with all the speed that the first coach he found could carry him. The horse was not quite worn out, and the driver, with the prospect of a double fare before him, did his best to make the whip supply the place of youth. But to Felix it seemed as though he were being drawn by a snail, and a hundred times he was on the point of stopping the carriage and of making the energy of exercise compensate for the tediousness of time. Even steam seems to creep along at the rate of something less than two miles an hour when the desire to be doing something is the last resource of the impatience of anxiety. Oxford Street seemed to have transformed itself into a sort of *Teufels-Kreis*, or diabolic circle, of

which the apparent straightness was caused by the immeasurable length of its diameter. At last, however, his journey was at an end. He knocked loudly and rapidly at the door which he had left that morning in a state of mind that had then seemed to him the very climax of bitterness, but which now, if by so doing he could be relieved from his present suspense, he would have voluntarily recalled.

Anxiously, and with an undefined expectation of hearing all manner of ill of a nature that he dared not put into shape, he asked the landlady of the house, who opened to him and who knew him well, if Miss Lefort was at home. During his ride his presentiment of evil had grown into almost monstrous proportions; and it seemed to have already borne fruit when he was still farther plunged into the sea of suspense by hearing that she had left the house that afternoon, and had not yet returned.

Knowing what he knew, and fearing what he feared, the news, trivial in itself, seemed to portend the worst; and he was not long in betraying his alarm to the landlady. He was not too apt to be cool at the best of times, and it was scarcely likely that he should be able to conceal his anxiety now.

"Did you see her before she went out?" he asked. "Did she say where she was going?"

"Yes; she just said as she was going out for a bit. You don't think any thing the matter, sir, do you? She wasn't like your play-acting folks in a general way—no offense to you, Mr. Grevil—as nobody knows which is their head nor which is their tail, as one may say; she were always so quiet, and always paid so regular."

"Did she seem disturbed—unhappy?"

"I don't know about disturbed exactly, Mr. Grevil. She seemed in a dream like—but she'd often be so. But I've thought a good while she didn't be like she ought to. She didn't eat half enough for a mouse's life, let alone a young woman's, as ought to have their meals regular or they pays for it in the end; and she were always at practice, practice, practice, from week's end to week's end—"

"And she said nothing to you of where she was going?"

"No, Mr. Grevil. She just went out, like as she might any day, though I did say to her—"

"She was to have been in Park Lane this evening, and she has not come. I dare say she has forgotten it, but—"

"Lord, Mr. Grevil," interrupted the landlady, like an echo of Monsieur Prosper, "she never forgets nothing. And if any thing *was* for to happen, as there's females knocked down before their very eyes by them coaches, as I well know, not to speak of that nasty orange-peel—oh dear, oh dear—"

"And—"

"There—that'll be her?" suddenly exclaimed the landlady, as a gentle knock was heard at the door. "Thank goodness—that's what I say." And she ran to open it, Felix following her.

"Is my cousin at home?" asked a voice from the dark door-step; and the heart of Felix, that had been buoyed up by momentary hope, sank again within him as he recognized the voice of Angélique; and that voice which would once have been sufficient to raise him from an even

deeper depth of anxiety, and to fill him with courage, now served only to make his depth of anxiety deeper still. But still all things were possible; and she might know something of Marie's movements during the afternoon.

But this chance also proved to be vain. "What—Monsieur Creville!" she exclaimed. "Can you tell me where I can go to look for Marie, if she is not at home? She had some business to do for me with Monsieur Prosper—"

"Ah, perhaps then she is gone to Golden Square," exclaimed Felix abruptly, trying all he could to battle with the fear that had now almost developed into certainty. "I will go and see. Wait for me here—I will not be gone an instant."

The idea was a mere straw, and he knew it. If she had wished to see Prosper she would not have gone where, knowing he would be in Park Lane, she knew he would not be. But still, before Angélique had time to ask a question, he was gone, and she was left to gather from the vague apprehensions of the landlady his fears for the safety of Marie, which were too genuine not to have proved contagious.

This time he did not take a coach—indeed his pocket was once more in its habitual state of emptiness. It was fortunate for him, however, that his pace did not call down upon him the cry of "Stop thief!" and at the end of about twenty minutes he returned.

"Miss Lefort," he began rapidly, all out of breath, and with the sweat streaming from his forehead, "I have the greatest fears about your cousin. And I am afraid I am the most to blame. You may not think there is much in her going out and not being yet returned. But you know her regular ways and her punctuality, and—"

"You fear an accident—an accident to Marie? *O mon Dieu!*"

"This morning I saw her, as you know; and I heard from her something—do you know her secret, Angélique?"

Of course Angélique knew nothing about it; but even then she was sufficiently true to herself not to permit such a thing as a secret to escape her, if she could help it. So she went on—

"Of course I know all about Marie—every thing. We are sisters, and there is nothing but confidence between us in all things."

"Do you know what I mean?"

"I can guess. And you may speak freely to me, whatever it may be."

Though she did not in the least know what he meant, she was perfectly honest in her belief that she possessed Marie's whole confidence; that there in fact existed between her and her cousin a partnership in confidences which was none the less complete because it resembled what the civilians used to call a *societas leonina*—that is to say, a partnership in which all the profit was on one side.

"In any case this is no time for secrets now," said Felix. "What is the name of her husband? where is he to be found?"

"Of her husband!" Angélique exclaimed, in genuine astonishment. "She told you she had a husband?"

"What! you did not know it?"

"*Mon Dieu!* But it is impossible!"

"When she herself told me so?"

"Ah, then it is true. And yet that I did not know it!"

To do her justice, she was really wounded by the thought that so important a confidence should have been withheld from her by the open-hearted Marie and given to a stranger. But a light suddenly broke upon her. In spite of her anxiety about the only creature whom she loved, and in whom she had at all events till now thoroughly believed, a presage of triumph as complete as it was unexpected suddenly filled her heart with what was almost the eagerness of joy. Had she indeed caught her enemy upon the hip at last?

"Felix," she exclaimed rapidly, with all its usual hard listlessness gone out of her face, and supplied by an energy that was as fierce as it was hard—"Felix, you are right; the time for secrets has gone by. You love me no longer, then? Well, in that you are right too. Were I a man, I would love where you love now. Oh, my poor Marie! Yes, I do know the name of her husband. It is that of the vilest villain upon earth—it is Mark Warden. You hate him, do you not? But you can not hate him more than I."

He looked at her for a moment amazed, and then the ground of Barton's suspicion grew clear.

"What!" he said; "Warden, the friend of Barton—Warden, who is to marry Miss Raymond?"

"Yes, that is the man. Who can tell what he has done with her when he has so much to gain by—"

It was not this that he feared; and, in fact, the idea was almost too monstrous to be entertained—too horrible even to be thought of.

"You mean—" he began. "But no—that can not be."

"Ah, you do not know this man! Oh Marie! if you had but told me—"

Felix was far too excited, far too worn-out to think, or indeed to dream of any thing but blindly obeying whatever impulse might seize him at the moment. Indeed, when he had plunged into the chamber of fire to save the husband of her whom he now loved so passionately, he was acting far more under the dictates of calm reason than he was capable of acting now. He was simply drunk with despair, and the words of Angélique acted upon him like fresh draughts of fiery wine.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "then there is but one chance left. There is a chance that he may know—and, if it is too late to save her, yet—"

Without another word he was gone.

"Felix!" cried out Angélique, in real alarm, "what are you going to do? Wait—do not be rash—"

But her words were lost in the closing of the street-door, and she was left to unravel this new complication alone.

It was scarcely yet more than half past eleven by the time that Felix again reached Park Lane, where Prosper, not without more anxiety of heart than he cared to own to himself—for what, after all, is really worth the anxiety of an artist but art, and of a speculator but money—had to make the best excuses he could for the non-appearance of his favorite *lionne*. The rooms were thus at their fullest when the most obscure of their guests, all disordered by running, re-enter-

ed them. The star was once more displaying her brilliancy, amidst a running accompaniment of conversation, which is so apt to languish when people are met to talk, but invariably grows lively when people are met to listen. Lord Farleigh had found his favorite position—the door; and Mark Warden had at last been rewarded by finding his, which was by the side of Alice Raymond.

But, in spite of the incessant buzz of what people are pleased to call conversation that filled the room, a semi-chorus of "Hush!" as Felix entered it without too much regard to the quality of those whom he was disturbing, recalled him for a few moments to himself. It was not that he was afraid of any thing or of any body; but the immediate plunge of a man heated by excitement into a room full of company, who for the most part are rather bored than otherwise, is the sudden contact of red-hot iron with iced water.

But such contact hardens, if it cools. As soon as the *cavatina* had reached its final chord, he took the opportunity, and the liberty, of disregarding the sacred line that was drawn between the amusers and the unamused by going up straight to Warden, whom by sight and repute he knew well enough.

"Mr. Warden," he said, in a tone that could certainly be heard by Miss Raymond if by no one else, "I am sorry to disturb you, but I bring you grave news, if you do not know it already. Madame, your wife, is missing from home; and I fear—it is feared, that something may have happened to her. Do you know where she is? If not—"

And so the message had come at last that Warden had ever since the morning been longing yet dreading to hear. But so many hours had now elapsed since he had received Marie's last words that he had begun to feel at ease, and as though what he had been expecting had been indefinitely postponed. So, now that it had come, he, for the first time in his life, felt his heart sink with apprehension, and almost with a guilty fear. But, as he had been steeling himself all day long to receive the message when it came, he was not taken by surprise. He did not even start; and when he saw the bearer of it, his resolution was taken in a moment. Not even the most scrupulous, he felt, could blame him for protecting himself, now that she who might have claimed some self-sacrifice on his part needed it no more. As for grief or remorse, he felt neither. It was part of his nature to be incapable of entertaining more than one idea at once; and for these he had no space for the present.

"Pardon me," he said, quietly and politely, "are you sure that you are not mistaking me for some one else?"

"Are you not Mr. Warden?"

"That is my name. But you spoke of my wife; and as I do not happen to have one—"

If this was not the tone of a murderer, neither was it that of a husband. And yet that he was, or rather had been, the husband of Marie, could not be doubted for a moment. He had heard that Marie was a wife from her own lips; and Angélique's certainty, confirmed by what he had heard from Barton, had become of necessity his own.

"You are not married to Marie Lefort?" he asked.

"No."

There was nothing now for Warden to do, now that fate had shown itself so clearly to be on his side, but to accept its kindness. It would at all events be an act of the grossest folly and weakness on his part to have taken such pains to keep his secret while Marie was living, only to let it go, now that it was past finding out.

Just then Prosper, seeing Felix in the room, came up to him. "Well?" he asked.

Felix, however, replied to Warden. "I do not pretend to understand you," he said. "Do you mean to say that you were never married to Mademoiselle Lefort?"

Warden looked at him with an affectation of carelessness, pointedly taking note of his appearance, from his boots, white with dust, to his disordered hair.

"Prosper," he said, "if this is a friend of yours, had you not better get him away? He seems to have been at the sideboard once too often."

The eyes and the attention of several in the room were drawn to where they were standing. "Come, Felix," said Prosper, "come away. What is all this business? What about Marie?"

But Felix did not stir.

"You accuse me of being drunk," he said in a loud voice, so that all the room might hear. "That is all very well, though you know that I am no more drunk than you are. You are a liar at the very least, if not something worse than a liar!"

The blood rushed back into Warden's face, which ordinarily only showed emotion by pallor. He, too, had his ideas of honor, which rebelled at a public insult, though, to serve his purposes, he had habitually borne the insulting speeches of Barton when there was none by to hear. Besides, his situation, however safe it might be, was at all events becoming ridiculous, and it was necessary, if possible, to avoid a scene about which people might talk afterwards.

"You drunken rascal," he said, half-fiercely, half-scornfully, "if you were a gentleman I would knock you down. As it is, you may congratulate yourself that I do not have you kicked from the room. Go home quietly, and let us have no more of this nonsense, unless you want to be put out by main force."

"You submit, then, to be called a liar? Am I to call you coward also?"

Such a mode of resenting Warden's insult as this was of course as absurd and as impolitic as could be conceived. Morally convinced as Felix was of being in the right, his conviction rested upon evidence that was nothing more than hearsay and circumstantial, and was devoid of any thing like proof. But he would have been more or less than human had he been capable of acting otherwise than absurdly now. It was not, after all, his own insult that he was thus resenting—though that, too, stung through his republican armor into the most sensitive part of his nature—so much as the wrongs of Marie, however convinced he might be that she was now beyond the reach of all wrong for evermore. In short, had he kept his temper, he would have proved himself to be either a match for Mark Warden or else a stone—and he was neither.

The latter laughed. "Do you expect me to call out a tipsy fiddler?"

"Some might think themselves bound to do that, if he called you both liar and coward. A fiddler may not impossibly be a gentleman, and a gentleman may most certainly get drunk. But, in any case, I fancy that a Mr. Warden is scarcely in a position to stand upon his *noblesse* with a Marquis de Créville."

The whole scene had been so far precisely like a regular comedy, of which this formed the climax. A laugh ran through the room, of which such of the occupants as had formed the audience, who, thanks to the unobtruded tones of Felix, were not a few, had, according to their sex, been fluttered or amused, and now were amused outright. But, though what naturally seemed a crazy or drunken vaunt fell with the effect of a blank cartridge upon him and upon those for whom it had been intended, there was one present of whose very existence Felix had scarcely heard, through whose heart the name that for more than thirty years had not been spoken by man passed with the sudden sharpness of lead.

A short, quick cry called the attention of the whole room from its immediate attraction. Miss Clare had risen from her seat, and was standing with her eyes fixed upon Felix in a rigid attitude, as though she were prevented from rushing forward by some unseen force stronger than her own that held her back. In truth, she was both deaf and blind to what was about her. Her ears were filled by the roaring of water, and her eyes by the round summits of snowy hills.

CHAPTER IX.

ANGÉLIQUE waited for the return of Felix in vain. At last, however, it was so evident that all chance of his coming back was over for that night at least, that she made up her mind to pass the time till morning where she was: an arrangement to which Marie's landlady, whose mind was filled with nameless and impossible visions of terror, in which orange-peel, though it was now the summer, held a conspicuous place, made no objection. But she was never a very sound sleeper at the best of times; and on this occasion she found repose out of the question, even though, for once, she would have been only too glad to have forgotten herself altogether. It must be remembered that her love for Marie was real and genuine, even although the spire of its shrine was in general overshadowed by the tower of the cathedral that she had raised to her own self. Not knowing either what Felix or what Warden knew, and being perhaps more ready to suspect the extreme of evil even than most people are—for trust in human nature, if it be not altogether an act of folly, is still incompatible with such absence of foolishness as hers—she saw in the sudden and mysterious disappearance of Marie the most terrible end of all. In a word, she more than suspected Warden of having actually carried out what had in fact only passed through his mind. As soon as morning came she went straight to where Felix lived; but he had not been in all night. Then she went to Golden Square; but Prosper had gone out early, leaving word that the hour of his return was uncertain. Then she did what it might have occurred to some women to do first of all:

she went to Cursitor Street, of which her husband was still an unwilling colonist.

He had been reading the "Trumpet" all the morning; and, as usual, instead of skimming its cream as formerly, in the space of a cup of coffee, had read it through from the first birth to the last auctioneer's advertisement, as a man does who knows that, when he has read his newspaper, nothing will be left for him to do but to read it through all over again. It is wonderful how a man will cling to his newspaper when it is the only link left that binds him with the great world. Hugh read with far more interest than he would have taken in the realities, accounts of debates that concerned him not, of budgets that made him neither richer nor poorer, of parties to which he was not invited, and of marriages of acquaintances in which the modern fashion of "no cards" was anticipated for him alone. It did not even concern him that "we understand that there is to be no contest for the representation of Denethorp. Mr. Prescott has not announced his retirement; but his active canvass has ceased, and it is considered certain that he will not go to the poll. Unless, therefore, as is exceedingly improbable, a new candidate should appear at the last moment, Mr. M. Warden will be declared duly elected at the nomination, which is fixed for the 29th instant. Mr. Warden, who will support the Government, is a Fellow of St. Margaret's College, Cambridge, and a native of the town that he will represent."

"Angélique," he exclaimed, throwing down the paper as she entered the room, "I can not stand all this any more. When I can once get out of this there will be nothing for it but to enlist; and you must go back to Miss Raymond, if she will have you. There are plenty of better men than I turn troopers, I believe; and if one did one's duty one might get one's commission after a while, especially if there should be a war. I have done my best, and the game has gone against us. I've been thinking about it all night, and there's absolutely nothing else left to do."

Under ordinary circumstances the idea would not have displeased her. But now she had something else to think of. In as few words as she could she gave him a full account of her facts and of her fancies. Her story seemed to hang together well—better even than she had herself fancied. But to Hugh it seemed incredible. Unlike her, he was not prone to think extreme evil; and the thought of murder is always incredible to any but policemen—at least until it has developed into deed.

"You must be wrong," he said. "There can be no such villain in the world."

But the old legal test of "*Cui bono?*" upon which every one acts, consciously or unconsciously, and whether he is a lawyer or no, was only too applicable in this case. In a word, Marie had disappeared from the world, her husband was to marry Alice Raymond, and scarce any thing was wanting but the *corpus delicti* to bring the case fairly home.

"I can not believe it," he went on; "but it must be looked into, for Warden's sake as well as Marie's. She may—she must yet be found. I do not believe that any one can disappear without leaving traces of some sort. But what can I do here? Angélique, I must get away

from this place. Can we make no arrangement, if only for a time?"

Every one knows the saying, "Talk of the devil." Every one accuses that luckless personage, who has to answer for every body's ill-luck besides his own, of being the father of all evil; and so it must logically follow, on the strength of the proverb that teaches that money is the fount and origin of all evil, that money and the devil are one. Hence, as often happens among doctors, there is a conflict of doctrine. On the one hand, speech of the devil brings about the projection of his horns; on the other hand, it is only too certain that one may talk of money as much as one pleases without thereby even raising so much as the shadow of a farthing's ghost. Probably Lester himself would have agreed with the great Cornelius, who, when some Wagner or other persuaded him to raise the devil,

"In the startled student's face
He threw—an empty purse."

But there is no rule without an exception. One may occasionally take the devil's name in vain without even seeing so much as the tip of a single horn; and it did once, at least, happen that speech of money had the same effect as that which comes from reciting the *Pater-noster* backward.

It came about in this wise: A letter—in itself now an unusual event for one to whom every post used in the old times to bring a mass of correspondence of all sorts and kinds, from the scrawl of the Denethorp voter to the scarcely more legible scrawl of a fine lady—was brought to him by the hands of the young lady the hue of whose hair had excited Dick Barton's admiration. It contained two things. One of them was a blank check signed by Miss Clare; the other was the following, in the handwriting of Miss Raymond:

"DEAR MR. LESTER,—I am sorry to have to tell you that Miss Clare was taken very ill suddenly, last night. We are in much anxiety about her. She has expressed a strong desire to see you, and I hope that you will be able to come at once. She bade me send you the inclosed, in order that there may be no delay. Believe me, yours truly,
ALICE RAYMOND."

There was certainly no occasion for Hugh to feel over-delicate now, even where money was concerned. At all events, Angélique had no scruples, and looked at the blank check, payable to bearer, with glistening eyes. She had learned the value of money by this time, and had discovered the extent to which the touch of Mammon may bring consolation, even for the loss of a sister.

"Oh, Hugh," she exclaimed, "she will forgive you at last! and I shall not have been your ruin, after all!"

Hugh, however, looked very grave indeed. "Her forgiveness will not bring me much happiness if this is my doing." He was looking at the letter, not at its inclosure. "But I must see her. How much will it want to get me out of this? I am detained by so many that I do not know how I stand."

She made a rapid calculation. A very little, comparatively speaking, would suffice to set him

free, at least for the present. Fifty pounds, she had told Marie. But she was not going to lose her opportunity, and so she said,

"You will want not less than twelve hundred pounds. Shall I fill it up at once?"

"Yes."

"And I will cash the check at once, and settle. Shall I?"

"As soon as possible. I must not stay here a moment longer than I can help."

So, after another short calculation as rapid as the first, she filled up the check for three thousand pounds. It was altogether a good day's work for her. Whatever might happen now, she was secure of a capital to start with for the present, even though Miss Clare's death without a will in her husband's favor might oblige her to begin the world again, and to fight its battle alone. At all events, she would not be without capital, even should she fail in her hope for better things. Perhaps had Miss Clare known which was the acting partner of the firm, she would not have left it to Hugh to fill up the piece of paper that was to be his passport to freedom.

It was evening before Hugh left Cursitor Street behind him, and was fairly on his way to his aunt's house. The door was opened by a footman who did not know him, and who told him that Miss Clare was too ill to be seen.

"I am Mr. Lester—Miss Clare's nephew. Is Miss Raymond with her?"

"Miss Raymond is with her, sir, and Mr. Warden."

"Please to let Miss Raymond know that I am here."

He waited down stairs for a few minutes, and then there entered to him, not Miss Raymond, but Mark Warden.

"The servant told me of your visit, Lester," he said; "but I fear it is too late."

A few hours since Warden was the very man whom of all others he wished to see. But this was no time for him to attend to Marie's concerns, now that his aunt was dying.

"You do not mean—" he began.

"I am grieved to tell you that I fear we must make up our minds to the worst. It seems to be some kind of stroke or other; and that, in her state of health—Dr. King has been with her, and we expect him again hourly. But the worst of it is the view that she herself has taken of her condition. She has just had a long interview with Mr. West—"

"The solicitor?"

"Yes—and she has been apparently terribly fatigued and excited."

"I must see her, if possible."

"I fear it is impossible. Any sudden shock—"

"Does she know I am here?"

"No. That is why I came down to you. She is now quiet and resigned. The sight of you would disturb her dreadfully, after all that has happened."

"But she wished to see me."

"I am afraid the wish is over. You could do her no good, and you might do her a great deal of harm. I do not mean that all hope is over—far from it, thank God—but—"

"I suppose I may see Miss Raymond?"

"Miss Raymond is with her. Even I dare not disturb Miss Clare by going into the room."

Warden was beginning to play the part of mas-

ter of the house a little prematurely; at least so it seemed to Hugh, who, disinherited as he was, could not see that any body had so good a right to give orders in it as he.

"Even you?" he asked. "Then I will take the responsibility." He rang the bell. "Go up," he said to the footman, "and tell Miss Raymond that Mr. Lester is here."

The man looked at Warden.

"Do you hear?" repeated Hugh; "or must I go myself?"

"And make a scene in a dying room?" asked Warden.

"Yes, if you do not let me go quickly. Miss Raymond told me to come; and unless she herself, with her own lips, tells me to go away again, I must remain. One would think, Warden, that you had some desire to keep me away."

"Oh, not the least. Her will is made, if that is what you are thinking of. But, if you make imputations, go up quietly, John, and let Miss Raymond know that Mr. Lester wishes to see her. Do not disturb Miss Clare. You will be responsible, Lester, if any thing should happen. I have done what I could."

"By all means."

The two remained without exchanging another word until Miss Raymond came in, who, it was plain, had passed a night of watching. She did not look at Warden, but held out her hand warmly to Hugh.

"Come up stairs," she said. "I thought you would never be here. She is better, and has not mentioned you; but I can see that she is longing for you. This is no time for pride. Come."

"But is it prudent—" began Warden.

Neither said a word, and they left the room together.

But Miss Clare did not by any means look like a dying woman when Hugh entered her room. On the contrary, her eyes were brighter and her color warmer than they had been for many a long day. She was not even in bed, as he had expected to find her, but was sitting upright—she always sat upright—in an arm-chair.

It was altogether so different from what he had looked to find, that he paused for an instant upon the threshold of the room. And he felt the full influence of the awe in which he had always stood of her from his childhood, when he once more, after so long, found himself actually in her presence. Indeed the awe was increased; for, in spite of appearances, he could not but know that he was also in the presence of approaching death.

But if there was no sign of death in her looks, so was there none in her voice. She spoke firmly, though with a constrained effort, as he went to her and took her hand.

"I thought you would come, Hugh."

"You wished to see me, aunt, and so I came. I would have been here some hours ago, but—"

"I know. Never mind that. I suppose that you have been told I am dying; but I am not so fortunate. The blow that ought to have killed me is over long ago. I think it has numbed me, so that I can now feel nothing more as I ought to feel. I have not brought you here, either, for what perhaps you might expect—"

"Aunt!"

"My dear," she said to Miss Raymond, "will you leave us for a few minutes? I have something to say to Hugh—"

Alice left the room, and Miss Clare continued,

"Hugh, when you disregarded my wishes, with your eyes open, there was nothing for me to do but to let you take the whole consequence of your folly. I had passed my word, and I was bound to keep it, be the consequences what they might; and you must have expected me to do so. I disinherited you at once, as you must have imagined. But it seems that I was wrong. You were not disinherited, for you never had any thing to inherit."

"Aunt, before you go on, tell me that though you punished me you still felt kindly towards me."

"Does a mother ever feel unkindly to her child, however weak and undutiful? No, Hugh; I felt no more unkindly towards you then than I feel now—now, when I ask you to be once more my son."

"Once more your son! You forgive me, then?"

"Wait. I do not forgive you, for there is nothing to forgive. What was a gross *mésalliance*—forgive me, but you know what I think about it—what was a gross *mésalliance* on the part of the heir of Earl's Dene is but of little moment on the part of one with no fortune and with his way in the world to make. I ask you to be my son, not my heir. Here is my will, which I have had drawn up by Mr. West this morning. I wish you to read it."

He read:

"This is the last will and testament of me, Anne Letitia, only child of Richard Colvil Clare, late of Earl's Dene, in the County of —, Esquire, and of Letitia his wife, both deceased, and relict of Louis Maximilian Victor, Marquis of Croisville, in the Kingdom of France. I give and bequeath—"

He looked up at her wonderingly; but she only signed to him to proceed.

Then followed bequests of personal property for the benefit of the poor of her own parish and of Denethorp, to the hospital at Redchester, to some old servants, to Mr. White, her Denethorp solicitor, and to the vicar of her parish. Then followed a legacy of £10,000 to Hugh himself, and of some jewelry to Alice Raymond. And then he read,

"And with the exception of and subject to the said bequests, I give, grant, bequeath, and devise absolutely to my only son Felix de Croisville, otherwise called Felix Créville, all the estate of which I am possessed at the time of my death, whether real or personal, of every kind whatsoever; and I direct that he shall bear the name and arms of Clare, together with and in addition to his own; and I appoint the said George White, Hugh Lester, and Felix de Croisville executors of this my will."

Naturally Hugh was unable to utter a word. He could but stare at this strange document in blank amazement.

"It is all true, Hugh," she said. "When I accompanied your father and mother to Paris, I became acquainted with that Marquis de Croisville, of whom you have doubtless read and heard as a leading spirit among the politicians of that time—of the time of the Revolution. He was the very ideal of what my dreams were then—a noble, but a democrat—a gentleman, but a phi-

losopher, as we used to call men of his ideas. I was to be to him another Madame Roland.

"We were together to become the apostles and prophets of the religion of liberty, first in France, and afterwards of the world. You have no doubt read of him as an ambitious man—and he was so. But that was no fault in my eyes. Well, I joined my life with his, and—need I say it?—without becoming a wife in any way that would be recognized by law. Do you understand me? It was the age of Reason, as we then called it—of blasphemous rebellion, as I call it now. I had one child, this Felix. Not that I named him so. I thought him lost: I thought he had perished with his father in that ravine in the Jura. You have read the fate of the Marquis de Croisville?"

"How, in escaping to the frontier across the mountains with his wife, he fell over a precipice?"

"That is a matter of history. But history knows none of the details, nor even do I. They are known to God alone; for I was ill and unconscious. When I awoke I was without either my husband or my child. Two men who found me there discovered the fate of the Marquis; and I could only suppose that he had carried the child with him to find for it a place of shelter. How I cursed the strength that had enabled me to survive that night!"

"And then?"

"The strength that kept me alive served me: it enabled me to recognize the justice of God. I wished to die; but I vowed that if I lived, it should be to expiate, so far as I could, my sins of disobedience to my father, of rebellion against one whom God had anointed king, and of my contempt of all His laws. It was I who had tried my utmost to bring Him into contempt, and a whole nation into wickedness and misery; it was I who had destroyed my husband, and, as I thought, my child; it was I who—I know it too well—caused the death of my father; it was I who had brought disgrace upon a stainless name. I scarcely know how it was that I was saved. I made no effort to save myself, but daily declared myself once more a royalist and a Christian. I was carried first to Besançon and then to Paris, where I lay in prison, and, as it were, upon the very steps of the guillotine. Had the fall of Robespierre been but a day later, I should have mounted them in reality. I could not but believe that my vow had been heard."

"And—"

"You know what my life has been since then. I remained with my father till he died, and I have always for his sake, and for that of all whom I had injured, kept my disgrace secret from the world. Since his death I have tried to do all for the cause of order and of religion that a woman may; and in you, Hugh, I endeavored to train one who would do for it all that may be done by a man. And then—"

Hugh bent his head with shame. It is a fearful and wonderful revelation when one whose life has been entirely upon the world's surface, who has but lived and enjoyed, and loved and suffered like other men, knowing no depths of passion or of sorrow deeper than it is given to most men to know, is suddenly admitted behind the scenes, and to secret depths which scarcely one eye in a million ever beholds. What had

been his sorrow compared with her anguish—his disappointment with her despair? Beside her he felt immeasurably little. He understood her now; and he was borne down by a consciousness that, in the presence of a tragedy like hers, he ought to have found it as easy to sacrifice his love as for a child to give up a toy.

It was of course impossible that any of this could express itself in words. But his voice expressed much, though he only said, after a long pause,

"So Felix Créville is your son?"

"In that sense. And he must not be made to suffer for his mother's sin—do you understand? Had I not sinned he would have been the heir to Earl's Dene. But, Hugh, though I can do him justice, I can not transfer to him the love of a mother that may be his of right, but that I had long since given away. And since I can not transfer to him what I have given to you, that makes me all the more bound to do him justice."

"My dear mother! I do indeed understand!"

"It is said that the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation. But that has always seemed to me a hard saying; and it is not for a mother to knowingly make herself the instrument of God's justice upon her son. And it surely is not for me, the sinner, to make others suffer through my own sin."

Hugh meanwhile had knelt beside her and taken her hand.

"No," she went on, "it is you that must be my son while I live. And say no word to any one. Our name must not be stained by scandal; and when I am dead let my act of justice be considered an old woman's caprice. You will be able to say that you know the circumstances; and if you acquiesce, so must all who have less claim upon me than you."

"I will indeed, dearest mother! I threw up Earl's Dene for the sake of love and honor long ago; and now I let it go willingly—gladly. But is it my part to be your son now? Has not Felix—"

"Yours only. Who can be so but you?"

"You do indeed forgive me, then? If I had only known—"

"And you will be content with my forgiveness and with my help while I live, and with nothing more?"

"More than content, dearest mother! And I will strive to be all that you would have me be. And Angélique—"

Her face grew hard again. "I once said that you must choose between Miss Lefort and Earl's Dene. Of course I can not say now that you must choose between her and me. I must not come between the husband and the wife; but that is no reason why the wife should come between the mother and the son. It is but a poor sort of affection that needs constant companionship; and I must spend the rest of my days alone. To that I have made up my mind. But oh, Hugh, you can not think it part of your duty to her to refuse to give me the comfort of the only affection for which I care? You will not, because I can not reconcile myself to her, forbid me to help you to the best of my power—to aid you in any career that you may choose—to let me hear of your success from yourself? Surely, though they may be

parted, a mother and son may be in heart and in truth a mother and a son still?"

The hardness had departed both from her voice and from her eyes when she had finished. They even seemed to plead to him in a way that filled him with pity, and made him feel that henceforth their relation was to be reversed; that it was she who had to lean upon him, and not, as of old, he upon her.

"It shall be so indeed, mother," he answered.

"I never meant, much as I loved Angélique, to break myself from you."

"And now," she went on, "when I die—which must, in the common course, be before very long—I shall feel that I have done all that it has been permitted me to do. I shall leave London again on Friday. Come and see me to-morrow, and we will talk about your plans. Now I must rest. I never felt the need of rest before; perhaps the need may be the promise."

CHAPTER X.

WITHOUT again meeting either Miss Raymond or Warden, and bewildered by what he had heard and seen, Hugh at once returned straight to Angélique. It is certainly not strange that speculation as to the fate of Marie had a little passed out of the minds of both of them. Hers was filled by revived hopes of victory and vengeance; his by the history of Miss Clare—a history that, had he heard it from any other than herself, would have appeared incredible. A man who is young both in years and in nature does not look to find a life-tragedy in the career of an old lady who has apparently lived alone all her days, and has never, within the memory of a whole generation, been more than fifteen miles from home. He was by no means of a romantic or imaginative tendency; but what he had heard had set such springs of romance and of imagination as were his fairly open, and he had caught a full glimpse of a real tragedy of human life such as he could otherwise never have conceived. He had at once been plunged to the very depths of sympathy. He could not only see but feel that her whole life, so outwardly tranquil, had been one of suffering incalculable, which had been by the very strength of the nature that had had to bear it rendered more incalculable still. Her very energy had drawn its sustenance, if not its birth, from suffering; and what had seemed the natural development of an active nature, had turned out to have been but the unnatural effort of one that had been stifled prematurely. There had always been much real sympathy between these two; but now sympathy had subdued awe, and drew strength and depth from compassion for a soul that has had to bear its load in silence and alone. Of course it was now his main duty to assist her, with all his strength, in redeeming by what seemed to him as well as to her an obvious piece of justice, any thing that touched the honor that was no less dear to him than to her. There was only one thing of which he was incapable. Filled as he was with pity and a sort of reflected remorse, it is still always a relief when secrets are over and barriers thrown down; and he was always incapable of observing the reserve of the eyes. His heart was lightened of a great load,

and the expression of his face in consequence misled Angélique very considerably. What she read in it was the result of good news indeed, and she supposed that the news was good for her.

"Well?" she asked, anxiously.

"Thank God," he said, "we are friends again!"

"And how is she? Better, I trust?"

"I was led to expect to find her dying; but, on the contrary, I found her apparently well and strong."

Angélique's face fell, ever so little.

"And she has forgiven you?"

"I hope fully; and, my poor child, I hope, too, that your troubles are over now. How well you have borne them! so well that you have scarcely allowed me to feel unhappy about you, and for the life into which I led you."

"Oh Hugh, dearest, I am so very, very glad! Do not think about me—love makes up for all! I have cost you nothing, then, after all—not your aunt's affection—not even Earl's Dene!"

"Oh, as to that, Earl's Dene is gone; that was gone long ago. But what then? I shall be able to make a career now, and we shall be rich enough to be happy."

She looked at him blankly.

"What! Earl's Dene still gone?"

"Yes; my aunt showed me her will."

"And yet she has forgiven you? I do not understand."

Hugh, as must have been seen, was one of the most unsafe men in the world with whom to intrust a secret; for he was one of those whose confidences are his wife's also. If he had ever dreamed of keeping any thing in the world from Angélique, it was not likely that she would not have found it out in time; and in fact he never did dream of keeping any thing from her. He read the prophecy literally, that "They twain shall be one flesh," and even extended it beyond its literal interpretation.

"Yes," he said, "in such a way that I can not refuse such aid as she may still give me. But to Earl's Dene I have no claim. It is not you that have lost it to me, my darling; it must have gone from me anyhow."

"What! and you have seen her will? It is to be Miss Raymond's, then?"

"No; not Miss Raymond's."

"Surely not Mark Warden's?"

"Warden's? Surely not. What put him into your head, of all people in the world? what right would he have to come between me and my aunt?"

"And she has no relations but you?"

"So we thought; but we were mistaken. She has the nearest relation in the world—she has a son."

"A son? Miss Clare a son?"

"She herself did not know it till yesterday. It is a strange story—almost incredible. It is Felix Crévile."

"Felix—Felix Crévile the son of Miss Clare? Are you laughing at me?"

"Laughing, Angélique? On the contrary, wonderful as it is, it is true. When she was a girl she was—privately married—to the Marquis de Croisville or Crévile—there seems some vagueness as to the name—who died in the French Revolution. This Felix Crévile is their son."

"He? How should he be her son—a mere adventurer—"

"You may well wonder, but—"

"I do not believe it; it can not be true. I have known Felix—"

"It is proved beyond the shadow of a doubt. A lawyer would be satisfied. There is proof and to spare."

"And you submit to such a monstrous imposition—"

"Angélique!"

"Yes—to such a monstrous imposition! You see her, she forgives you, and yet she leaves every thing to an adventurer—"

Hugh looked at her amazed. But he was any thing but clear-sighted where Angélique was concerned. "But his being an adventurer," he said, "does not prevent his being her son."

"But her real child? Her child in marriage?"

"But even then—"

"I see—and you submit to her leaving Earl's Dene to a bastard!"

"Angélique, it is I who do not understand. She has an entire right to dispose of her property just as she pleases, without any one interfering or complaining. My only claim to it depended upon her own will and pleasure, and, of course, I must resign any claim that I might fancy I had in favor of one who has a right to it beyond all living."

"And be content with barren forgiveness?"

"I should have been content with even so much as that. But did I not tell you—"

"And she has left you nothing?"

"Ten thousand pounds."

"That is nothing. It is not four hundred a year."

"It is not very much, of course; but it is clear that the election could not have left her much to leave without damaging the estate; and then there is the chance of another contest, too. That she has done as much for me as she can do without wronging her heir I am as sure as that I stand here."

And he was right. Could Miss Clare have made her inclination square with what she considered to be her duty as mistress of Earl's Dene, Hugh would even yet have been a rich man. But, though she was not always just, she had at least the merit of never being just by halves, whatever might be the cost to her and hers.

But Angélique took a different view of the matter. "Four hundred a year!" she repeated; "and meanwhile—?"

"There are plenty of things—the army, for instance."

"The army!"

"Do you not like the idea? Or there is the Church—or there must be something or other."

Oh hunchbacked shadow, who every day, every hour, art returning to remind us of that world of beasts and birds in which every man finds his own likeness, every man his own story! Thou didst not write fables, if a fable is but another word for a lie. The dog bearing the meat did not only cross the running stream of thy fancy, but is every moment crossing the streams of all our lives, and grasping at the thousand shadows reflected in them as they flow.

It once happened that a youth was sent out by his good fairy into a ripe field of corn tha

waiting for the harvest, and was told beforehand that his future good fortune should be in proportion to the number of ears borne by the single ear that he should pluck therein—only he must pluck but once, and no more. By the gate through which he entered stood tall stalks that had borne a hundred-fold: but he saw how the red and golden field stretched before him, acre after acre, and he thought, surely there must be finer ears than these; peradventure I shall come to where the stalks have borne a thousand-fold. Then he went on till he came to where they had borne fifty-fold: and he thought, surely here must be a space of poor soil; I will tarry till I reach the taller stalks again. Then he went on till he came to where they had borne but ten-fold; and these he scorned. Then he came to where they grew in patches, bearing scarce two-fold: and at last, after passing by a few withered straws bearing perhaps a single mildewed grain, he went out as empty as when he went in.

And so would Angélique, had she plucked her first straw and held it fast, have been the lady of Earl's Dene, after all; and it is by no means impossible that the memory of certain passages of the old time made her feel, now, that she would just as soon have been so under the name of Mrs. Crévillé as under that of Mrs. Lester. But, as things were, to have to look forward to the day when she might take rank as the wife of a half-pay major as the summit of her hopes—it was simply intolerable. She guessed only too truly what Hugh meant by a career, whether in the army or elsewhere; and she had not by any means such belief in him as to believe him fit to do any thing but live upon ten thousand a year.

No wonder, therefore, that the poor girl lost her temper when she thought of the full, ripe ear of wheat that might have been hers. She must have done so sooner or later, and it had been long upon the ebb. And now unutterable contempt was added to her disappointment.

"Grand Dieu!" she exclaimed outright, with flashing eyes and at an incisive pitch of voice that is peculiar to agitated macaws and exasperated Frenchwomen—"Grand Dieu! that I should be tied for life to a fool!"

CHAPTER XI.

OF course there were plenty of rumors about Marie's disappearance, both in the profession and elsewhere, each and all of which were founded upon authority of the highest, and proof of the most irrefragable kind, to account for a step on her part which seemed altogether unaccountable. A successful artist does not throw up the prospect of a career such as hers promised to be for nothing; nor can a woman of flesh and blood suddenly disappear from the world in these unsupernatural times without a natural cause.

One rumor was—of course—that she had gone off to the Continent with a certain notorious *roué* and spendthrift; the evidence being that she had been seen dining at a hotel, at Dover, in his company, on the evening on which she had been due in Park Lane.

A second was—also of course—that her companion had not been the *roué* aforesaid, but a married and intensely respectable man of high

rank and great wealth, with whom she had been seen on board a steamer at Liverpool, at the same hour of the same evening.

A third, that the immaculate Marie had, on her way to a concert, been suddenly attacked in a hackney-coach by the pains of labor, and that she had retired into the country for a month, more or less; the evidence being positive assertion, and the number of the coach, which was said for certain to have been 8531.

A fourth, that she had run away to avoid a criminal charge, the nature of which was variously quoted as shop-lifting, swindling, forgery, arson, and murder—but more especially murder. There was overwhelming proof, supported by ample evidence of time and place, to prove each and all of these.

A fifth, that she was over head and ears, not in love, but in debt.

A sixth, that she had been claimed by a husband, who had just completed his term as a *forçat* at Brest, or, as others said, Toulon.

A seventh, that she was in the pay of the secret police of Paris—or, according to others, of the *bureau des affaires étrangères*, and, having completed her mission in England, had been recalled.

An eighth, that she had been driven from the field in shame by the marvellous playing of the talented Miss Smith. This was believed in by the immediate friends of that young lady, but by no others; and was indeed stoutly denied by the immediate friends of the talented Miss Green.

A ninth, that her real name was not Marie Lefort, but the Princess Alexandrovna Suloff: that she had been implicated deeply in a conspiracy to assassinate the Czar, instigated thereto by her lover—of course she had a lover—who was a sub-lieutenant of hussars serving in the Caucasus: that, upon the plot having been discovered, she, after receiving eight hundred and ninety-seven lashes with the knout, had escaped from prison, and walked, dressed as a Polish Jew, from Moscow to Königsberg: that thence she had made her way, hidden in a cargo of timber, to London: that she had been recognized, in the course of a performance, by an *attaché* of the Russian Embassy, who had been an unsuccessful rival of the sub-lieutenant: that she had been seized while walking in Oxford Street, at dusk, by three men, disguised as watchmen, but in reality *employés* of the Embassy: and that her piano must henceforth lighten the labors of the miners of Tobolsk. This report, of course, bore its truth upon its face.

A tenth, that her disappearance was a dodge of Monsieur Prosper's.

Thus for nine days were the waters disturbed, and then the circling wavelets of which she had been the centre ceased, and she seemed to have sunk like a stone beneath the surface of the lake of life, and to have left no sign. Felix, aided by Monsieur Prosper, sought for traces diligently, but in vain. No corpse was discovered upon the piers of the bridges, or floating among the river craft; no hospital walls had witnessed the parting of her soul and body; no sail had carried her away from that England where she had been so unhappy. Most strange of all, in the case of one in whom thought for others was a habit unconquerable by any emotion short of despair, she had apparently deserted the orphans to whom she had devoted all the strength that she had not given to

her husband and to her art. At last nothing was left to him who sought for her the most ardently but certain despair, tempered only by the hope of vengeance, even though the position of Warden was so far unassailable before the world.

Now it was all very well for Barton to be free from confinement, and to be trying to negotiate loans for other people; but he was most sorely in need upon his own account. As to how it happened that, once being in confinement, he ever became free, or that, being free, it was ever worth the while of any body to take his freedom from him, is only one of those daily and hourly mysteries in the life of such a man that can no more be solved than the great mystery of the universe itself. There are, as every one who is tolerably acquainted with great cities knows, hundreds of men who do not earn so much as the wages of a west-country laborer, and who yet somehow drift along, no one knows how, without being able to obtain a quarter of what are usually—but, in such cases, to all appearance falsely—considered the necessities of life, such as meat and lodging, but existing upon what are usually considered its luxuries, such as, in one case, lavender gloves, in another cabs, in another tobacco, in another brandy. The mystery is certainly not rendered the less insoluble by others by reason of its being equally so by such men themselves; nor, seeing that this is not the history of Dick Barton, is there any need to attempt to solve it here.

It almost looks as though, for purposes of mere existence, supposing mere existence to be worth having for its own sake, it is sufficient to live by Faith: by Faith, that is to say, in Accident. But sometimes even he who lives by Faith must think, and, like Barton himself, occasionally catch a confused and barren glimpse of his position. And now this believer of believers was sober by compulsion. There was absolutely no one left of whom to borrow half a crown. He was roofless, dinnerless, breakfastless, supperless, penniless, friendless, all at once—and brandyless into the bargain. His sole possessions were clothes which were not clothes, as his friend Euripides would have called them, his Horace, and his hunger. But perhaps what weighed most heavily upon him was his quarrel with the only real friend that he had in the world.

"Unlucky devil that I am," he said to himself, when his anger with Warden had cooled down, and the troubles of Hugh Lester had passed away from his mind, "that no one should ever take me up but to let me fall again—not even a French fiddler. Why, in the name of the Fates and Furies, was I ever born? I have never even got so much as five minutes' enjoyment out of this world that canting blockheads are always crying up as so beautiful. But I doubt if I'm alone in that, for that matter—and so what is the good of trying? Man made to be happy—Bah! Man was born to eat thistles, and be soundly cudgelled, and be an ass. I have half a mind to put an end to the whole business altogether. But in this black-hole called England—not that I suppose it's blacker than any other hole called any thing else—one can't even make so cheap a *quietus* as that without a fee. One can't hang one's self without rope; and rope costs something; and it might as well cost a thousand guineas as a penny to a vagabond like me. One might starve to death, it is true—but that, in my case, would not

be suicide: it would be natural death with a vengeance. And, after all, I doubt if I should have the energy to do any thing very deliberate without having my belly full—and a full belly means content with things even as they are. It is sad for the hunted ostrich. Well, it comes to this, I suppose, that I must live and see the farce played out. It can't be very long, I suppose. But what a preposterous joke it is that a man should have muscle and stomach and brains better than those of half the world put together, and yet, at the age when he ought to be at his best, be starving here in the streets, when idiots whom I could twist round my little finger and thrash with it afterwards are washing down ortolans with Tokay! The world beautiful, indeed! It is the master-piece of Momus, the arch-joke of the devil's court-jester. But even so, I must be fit for something; and if the people had the spirit of a mouse, we should see. If I could but cry out, 'To the Barricades!' with any hope of an answer! I am almost tempted to give up the game and turn—respectable. But even for that it is too late now."

He had by this time walked on until he found himself in Lombard Street—a quarter as exciting to a man without a penny as Vanille ice to Tantalus.

"I remember once proposing to Felix to take to the road. Suppose I take to the city instead? One would get one's rope *gratis* then—there's no fee to the hangman—and I would make my last dying speech in Demosthenic Greek. It would be worth it, only for the joke's sake: I fancy it would puzzle even the Ordinary. By Jove, there's Prescott! Drink—beggary—crime: that's the regular *facilis descensus*, I believe. I've gone through the first, so I suppose it's time to try the second. Holloa, Prescott! good-morning. How are stocks or funds, or consols or discount, or whatever you call it, to-day? And which is your present constellation—Taurus or Ursa Major?"

It was part of the banker's policy to be popular; but he simply stared at his old instrument and passed him by. But Barton followed him.

"Can you lend me half a crown?" he went on. "I've got nothing but thousand-pound notes in my pocket, and I want change."

"You are an impudent blackguard," answered the banker, increasing his pace.

"You won't? Is that your gratitude? You're not going to stand for Denethorp again, then? For I'm worth buying still, I can tell you—and all for the small price of half a crown. Remember Tarquin and the Sibyl."

"You are worth more than that to be rid of. There," said Prescott, tossing him a guinea, and turning into his bank, at the door of which they had now arrived. He did not wish it to be thought that he had been stung, and he liked to be contemptuously munificent.

"Now," said Barton to himself, when he was left alone with his new wealth, "I suppose I ought to have thrown it back in the fellow's face. But—*non olet*. And this time no one shall call me prodigal. I'm almost tempted to drill a hole in it and hang it to my watch-chain—if I had such a thing. A guinea is the true charm against evil, after all. Who was it said that the definition of riches is the immediate possession of five shillings? But yet, hang it all, what's a

sister—of your mother? But let it be remembered what is meant by despair—not sorrow merely, not even anguish, but the mad hopelessness that, when it comes, overwhelms even the strongest soul, and draws a black veil between heaven and the hearts of those of whom alone it has been written that they shall see God.

"Oh, I am too weak even to die!" she cried out; "what does any thing matter—even life? Do with me what you will—take me where you please; only I am Marie Lefort no more. I will earn my children's bread; but for God's sake let the secret of my life be known to you only. Indeed I have cause to be dead to all who have known me."

"Poor child! I fear there is something outside the old story, after all. So be it, then. I promise—on my word of honor, if I have any thing left of that rather vague article. But say—are you afraid of me?"

"Of you? oh no; why should I be afraid of you?"

"Some people might think so. So be it, then. I had a sister once, who was lucky enough to be put under ground before she was six years old; and for whom, I suppose, therefore, the gods entertained the whole of the very small amount of affection that they had to spare for me and mine. She was called Esther, I remember. Very well, then; you for to-day shall be Esther Barton—and for as many more days as you please."

CHAPTER XII.

It has been said that there was but one thing left for Felix to do. It was shortly this: and, if he has to any extent succeeded in obtaining the sympathy of the reader so far, it is much to be feared that he may run some risk of losing it now.

The literature of the duel is fast dying out. That duelling itself should have ceased to be an English institution may or may not be well; but, whether it be the one or the other, it is at any rate highly inconvenient. Its decadence has to a very great degree unmodernized the life of only fifty years ago, and made it in a very essential feature as unsympathetic to readers of the present day, who require, above all things, for their mental food the realism of their own daily life, and to exercise their imagination upon real tea-cups and real saucers of the most modern fashion, as a romance would be of which the scene should be laid in the *Campus Martius*, and in the year of the city 753. The hair-trigger has become as obsolete as the *pilum* or the *sica*. Not only in character, but in ideas and in conduct also, must our grandfathers be made to resemble their grandsons, in order to be made presentable in what one would think should be the cosmopolitan and cosmoerual society of literature; and, on the same principle as that on which the French painter dressed the guards of Dido in the uniform of the *mousquetaires du roi*, must we dress the neckclothed and padded dandy of fifty years since in the shooting-jacket of to-day. It is therefore an essential characteristic of the virtuous hero of a modern story that he should hold *duelling* either in abhorrence or in contempt, *as he is a good Christian or a good man*

of the world; and it is, in fact, really hard to call to mind that the man who would now be considered a sensible fellow, would only half a century since have been called a coward, and cut dead by every man of honor. Had Felix lived in these days he would, doubtless, after having been smitten on the one cheek, have turned his other to the smiter in the most orthodox manner possible; and, as it was, this would doubtless have been the commendable course. What does a word signify, after all, that affords no ground for an action for damages? If fine words butter no parsnips, neither do hard words break any bones. It is a highly useful and sensible policy, that which is contained in the great principle of "It does not matter," and saves its disciples from scrapes innumerable. But, unfortunately for his credit, he did not live in these days; and, being quick-natured and sensitive, and having, perhaps owing to his social position, almost exaggerated notions of the duties, although he denied the rights, of gentle blood, he thought that an insult mattered a great deal. There is no such aristocrat in the whole world as the thorough-going republican who happens to have been born a gentleman; and though a marquis might be entitled to no privileges, a De Créville could never cease to be a De Créville, though his name might be ignored not only by the world, but by himself also.

After all, whatever people may think, no fact can be changed by any amount of change of view. Plenty of good men have fought duels, and yet have been no more murderers in their hearts—by which, and not by their deeds, it is to be presumed that men ought to be judged—than the most forgiving and meek-tempered of their race; and plenty have not only fought them, but have killed their man, without a thought that a gentleman, if not exactly a Christian, should be ashamed to own. The tenderness for human life as such, and not because it is particularly worth having or keeping, which seems to have culminated in recognizing in the body of the foulest murderer a holy temple not to be lightly meddled with by human hands, did not exist in days when even so purely arbitrary an institution as honor was held to be something better than human life. It is very lamentable, of course, that Felix lived in times that allowed him to behave as no one would be justified in behaving, now that the idea of moral courage is almost opposed to that of physical. He had not even the excuse of being forced into what he did by the pressure of public opinion; for, though in his own eyes there was now no course open to him but one, the world would certainly not have wasted a thought upon the matter.

But Felix was his own public opinion; and in due course Mark Warden received a challenge. How he took it may be imagined: he simply laughed it to scorn, and only sent back word that he should call in the assistance of the law if he found himself further annoyed. In fact, he only did what any sensible man in his position would have done, whether in those days or in these.

It was written, however, that the matter was not to end here. The mass of circumstances, slight and apparently trivial in themselves, of which this story is composed, was gathering like a mass of snow, which is composed of the finest particles, but which, by gradual accretion, be-

comes an avalanche. If mountains are mothers of mice, it is from mole-hills that we must look for monsters.

One passion only now filled the breast of Angélique. It was simply a wild passion for revenge—for revenge against Warden, against Felix, against Hugh, against Miss Clare—in short, against all the world. The last blow had been too cruel, and the remorse of self-interest only made matters worse a thousand-fold. She was enraged with herself for having been so befooled, and for having lost her temper when perhaps all else had not even yet been wholly lost; and, after her fashion, she vented her rage upon every body but herself. She left her husband in his amaze, and hurried to the chambers of Mark Warden in the Temple. He was out, but she waited there till he returned, much to the excitement of the boy, who had never opened the door to a female visitor in his life before.

Warden himself was surprised to hear that a lady was waiting to see him, and that she would not give her name. He was still more surprised when he saw who the lady proved to be.

"Mr. Warden," she began at once, without giving him her hand, "we have been bitter enemies. I know it now as well as you, who have known yourself my enemy all along; and we shall be worse enemies still, perhaps, when we have to reckon about my poor Marie. Yes, you are her murderer, in one way or another. But we must be at peace now, though I hate you from my soul. Miss Clare has made her will."

"This is strange language, Mrs. Lester. Do I understand that you are come to accuse me of the murder of—of your cousin? Do I look like a murderer—have I acted like one? I can pardon much to your grief, in which I also share; but—"

"Oh, you can look like what you please, except like what you are; and that is a— But did I not say there must be peace between us now? If you are what I think you, there will be proof enough in time; and even if you choose to take my warning, you are a ruined man any way. No—I do not come to accuse you of any thing; I come to tell you that Miss Clare has made her will."

"I know it."

"But do you know what it is?"

"Of course not—how should I? And if I did, I should respect her confidence."

"And you do not know who is her heir?"

"I certainly did not inquire. Your husband, I hope."

"No—her son."

"Her son?"

"Yes—Felix Créville."

And she told him the story as she heard it from Hugh.

When she had come to an end Warden was as pale as death.

"And why do you come to me?" he asked.

"Why? do you wish that Felix should have Earl's Dene? You are not the man I take you for if you can think of no means—"

"Thanks for your information; and thanks for letting me know your opinion of me. I am neither disappointed nor angry. Earl's Dene is nothing to me; and I can make any number of excuses for your anger under the circumstances. But I can not help you, and I certainly can think of no means."

If he could, he would certainly not have taken her into his confidence.

"No means? No means to keep from the hands of another what you have been plotting and lusting for all your days? Are you a lawyer, and can you think of no means? Perhaps the will may be a bad one; perhaps—"

"You had better be careful, Mrs. Lester; I am lawyer enough to tell you that. As I have said, I can understand your disappointment; but it seems to me that you are suggesting to me that I should commit a crime. Now, supposing that I were disposed to figure in a criminal court—which I certainly am not—I should prefer the crime to be for my own benefit."

"I said just now that I will fight you still; and so I will, to the end. But neither of us can conquer if this will is to stand. Between us, you certainly have the best of it. And yet can you be so tame as to—"

"What you call tameness, Mrs. Lester, I call submission to ill-fortune. And what interest have I, I should like to know, in Earl's Dene? I should like it to have gone to your husband, of course, but—"

"You are a greater hypocrite even than I took you for. But I am not altogether blind. You found me willing enough to take your hints once before, and I see that you are not unwilling to take mine now in return, however much you may try to throw dust in my eyes. Good-morning."

"The woman must be mad," he said to himself when she had left him; and he really almost thought so. But what she had said had made him regard a duel with Felix with somewhat different eyes than before.

"No, she is not mad," was his second, and therefore his best, thought. "I see it all. No—Earl's Dene is not gone, and must not go. I must not have worked all this time for nothing, though it has come to staking my life against success—though the question is reduced to that of a chance bullet between him and me."

His being possessed with one idea had given him the most dangerous quality of all; and in fact there are no men in the whole world more dangerous than men possessed by one idea. When put to it, they become as reckless of themselves as of others, like a mad Malay. He had not gone so far, to draw in his horns now; and he now saw that the cunning brain must give place to the strong and ready hand. If he should fall—well, he was no coward, and fully ready to take all ordinary risks of the time.

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who fears to put it to the touch,
To win or lose it all,"

sings the soldier-minstrel of the cavaliers; and though the song is of noble things, it will apply to the ignoble also. Warden was confident in his fate and in his deserts as well. And the chances that such men should rise the winners are myriads to one. *Fortuna favet fortibus*—it is cowards and doubters who lose. He was neither. He had risen to the occasion, and felt that he had made it his own.

"MY DEAR ANDREWS,—Can you do me a very great favor? I have a disagreeable and rather delicate affair on hand just now, in which it is difficult to know how to act. I fear, howe-

that it must end seriously, and I very much wish for your advice in the matter. If you will give it me, let me know where I can see you to-day, and at what hour. Yours most sincerely,

"M. WARDEN.

"Major Andrews."

"Mr. Warden presents his compliments to Mons. Créville, and, on consideration, will be glad to receive any friend of Mons. C., with a view to a final arrangement of the misunderstanding between them. Mr. W. will be found at his chambers, 7 Elm Court, Temple, during the whole of to-day."

These he dispatched forthwith, and then turned to Coke upon Littleton to pass the time while waiting for their effect.

The answer to the first soon arrived. It was merely as follows :

"MY DEAR WARDEN,—All right. Come and dine with me here at six o'clock. Such things are always best discussed over a bottle.

"Yours very truly, A. R. ANDREWS.

"M. WARDEN, Esq."

But in the matter of the second the delay was very much longer. The fact was, that for the *soi-disant* Marquis de Créville to find a friend for such a purpose and in such a sense was no easy matter.

Prosper would certainly not do : nor, *a fortiori*, any of his orchestral *confrères*. It would be to cover the affair with ridicule.

But find one somewhere he must. At last, as a *pis-aller*, he bethought him of Dick Barton. Any way he was a graduate of Cambridge, and might therefore take brevet rank, as it were, in such a case.

This thought, however, scarcely diminished the difficulty. It was easy to think of Barton, but by no means so easy to find him, seeing that his address was something like "Richard Barton, B.A., The Streets, London."

CHAPTER XIII.

No time, however, had to be lost. So he went straight to the office of the "Trumpet" and inquired if any thing had been seen or heard lately of the most errant of its contributors. He could scarcely be said to hope for success, and was almost surprised to learn that Barton had called there the very day before, and had given an address somewhere in Lambeth.

Lambeth was not a very likely quarter in which to look for a friend in an affair of honor. But there was no help for it ; so he set out at once, and, after another series of difficulties, at last succeeded in discovering, not far from the bishop's palace, No. 48 Saragossa Row, to which he had been referred.

He who invoked the

"Nymphs that reign o'er sewers and stinks,"

could never have paid a visit to Saragossa Row, Lambeth, or he would never have libelled the city of Johann Maria Farina. A whole flood of Cologne-water would not have served for a sufficiently powerful baptism to regenerate Saragossa Row, of which the prevailing feature was an

odor that would have defied the analysis of the most skilled of chemists, except so far that the most unscientific nose could trace in it a strong element of cabbage-water of a peculiarly outrageous kind. The shops that it contained were for the most part those of small butchers, grocers, and chandlers, redolent of short weight and adulteration ; and this may have had something to do with the matter. Its inhabitants apparently consisted of troops of very small boys and girls, who, having rolled for pleasure in the mud-bank of the Thames, were in the habit of cleansing themselves in the gutter of their native street ; and this, no doubt, had to do with the matter still more. At any rate, the three kingdoms of nature must have combined to produce the atmosphere in which Felix now found himself. But what words can describe a smell, whether of rose or of bilge-water ? Easier by far would it be to describe the hopeless poverty of the neighborhood ; its filth, of which the part that was unseen was worse, if possible, than the part which was seen ; its hot and all-pervading dust, every mote of which must have been a seed of fever ; its squalor, and its despair. Saragossa Row exists no more. But its family has grown and multiplied a hundred-fold, and, baffling description, grows more prolific from year to year. Let those who need a description go and see for themselves. The sight will not prove un-instructive, and they will not have to go far.

No. 48 proved to be the shop of a small dealer in *articles de luxe*—though not, indeed, made of *papier maché* and ormolu. The window was stocked with clay pipes, white mugs ornamented with blue letters, and blue mugs with white ; penny song-books, and guides to dream-land ; slices of plum-cake, and sticks of liquorice ; lucifer-matches, and an old umbrella ; so that Dick Barton was lodged aristocratically indeed. The tenant was from home ; but Felix, on making the old woman who reigned over this multifarious stock understand that he would write a note—probably a new idea to her altogether—was shown into his room, which was certainly a far worse lodging than the Mall, for the purpose of finding pen, ink, and paper—articles of too surpassing luxury to be contained even in the window.

The up-stairs room appropriated to Dick Barton was very much what might have been expected from the external surroundings. There was one unsteady table, that contrived to balance itself after a fashion upon the carpetless floor ; there were three chairs, of different orders of architecture and of different ages ; there was a corner cupboard, a broken poker, a dozen rat-holes—and that was about all. The day was warm and close, but the window was closed ; and, considering all things, so much the better. Felix looked round him in vain for writing-materials. He did not know that people whose profession is literature in any of its forms never by any chance are the owners of a pen that will write, of ink that will run, or of a clean sheet of paper. Such things are *articles de luxe* indeed, that brand the amateur. But his search, though vain in this respect, was not without affording material for the exercise of curiosity.

The room, though grimed with the dust of ages, was free from the least suspicion of the dust of to-day. The table and the three chairs were

ranged as symmetrically as they might be; and, wonder of wonders, there stood in a white and blue mug, apparently rejected from the stock for having lost its handle and a large piece out of one of the sides, a real purple hyacinth, which seemed to fill that one room, after what he had passed through on his way, with a breath from heaven, and with dreams of the fair face of nature, unmarred by such foul spots of leprosy as Saragossa Row.

Now, in all consistency, any room occupied by Dick Barton should have been inch-deep in dust and neck-deep in disorder, while the only odor at war with the foulness without should, at best, have been that of the stale fumes of departed spirits within. And as for a flower upon the mantel-piece, it was as much out of place as it would have been in his button-hole. It was clear, therefore, to Felix, than whom no one was better acquainted with all his ways, that he was not companionless in his new abode, and that his companion was a woman.

Of course, that such a thing should be was not in itself wonderful. But it was wonderful in Barton, who hated the whole sex, both in theory and practice, with a perfect hatred, tempered only by the sentiment of the scholar for *Lesbia* and *Chlœ* and *Lalage*. But to imagine him actually living with even *Lesbia* herself was as easy as to imagine him living without brandy. Like most men whose speech is exaggeratedly foul, his life, where women were concerned, was, from whatever cause, as pure as that of St. Anthony himself, or rather purer, for he seemed beyond the pale even of temptation. But still all things are possible; and as he had, in the experience of Felix himself, been known to go five weeks without brandy, so he might, within the bounds of possibility, have fallen into a sort of domesticity for five days or so. Perhaps it had suited some decayed or neglected beauty of the southern side to make a convenience even of Dick Barton; perhaps she had followed him for love—who could tell? For he possessed just that kind of strength that would have made many a foolish girl or woman follow him even there.

Felix was thus engaged in speculating upon the character of him whom, in spite of their quarrel, he knew to be his friend still, when he heard the well-known elephantine tread which slowly ascended the stairs like the statue of the *commendatore*, and an instant afterwards the big voice that belonged to it calling out—

"Esther, are you in? By God—Felix! No—she's not in. Confound it all, though—Mrs. Wood! If Miss Barton comes home, tell her I'm particularly engaged—do you understand?"

"Miss Barton?" asked Felix.

"Yes—my sister. Why shouldn't I have a sister like any other man?"

Felix held out his hand.

"I have been angry with you without cause, and very ungrateful. Will you forgive the anger of a man who had but just recovered from brain fever? For the sake of your own kindness to him?"

"Forgive! Not I. I'm only too glad to see you again. As for forgetting, that's another matter. The waste of good liquor is not a thing to be so easily forgotten; and yet if all the brandy that has been poured down my gullet had been poured into the gutter instead—"

"You remember the cause of our quarrel?"

"Of course I do. To think that you and I should quarrel about a woman! Felix, old fellow, I don't think I ever made an apology in my life, and so I don't exactly know how to begin. Much cause there is for me to forgive you! Mind, I don't think a bit better of women now than I did then. I still think them all—, every one of them. But there is one who is an angel."

"Yes, an angel in heaven," said Felix, sternly. "She is nothing more to you or to me. But there is a devil upon earth who is something to me still."

"I know who you mean, the canting scoundrel! What, in the name of the fire of hell, made you save him from the fire of that theatre? But no matter for that. He'll come to the fire at last, all in good time."

"Barton, I did not come to ask you to forgive me, or to talk about—her. On the very night that she disappeared I challenged Mark Warden, and he refused to fight me, like a coward. To-day, however, I received this."

"He will fight you? Oh, how I envy you! If I only had him before me on a good smooth piece of hard ground, such as I used to know in Cumberland, I would soon see if I had forgotten how to try a fall! There should be none of your twelve paces—that's the number, isn't it?—between him and me. And I promise you his fall should be to the bottom of Styx; and I'd pitch my last *obolus* after him, to pay his passage, with all the pleasure in hell."

Here was promising material for a second! But Felix continued,

"Will you go to him? You know what I mean. We must fight—not play at fighting. If I put a bullet through him the world is rid of a scoundrel; and if he through me—*tant mieux*."

Barton looked steadily at Felix, and sighed.

"I hate duels," he said. "I'm not a coward, I fancy; but what's the good of having thews and sinews if one doesn't use them? You call it chivalry, I suppose, to give up one's advantages; I call it folly: and you ask me to stand by and help Warden to shoot you—for I'd back the beast against a man like you, at twenty paces, twenty to one. I know you. You'd be as nervous as a tiger, and he'd be as cool as the steadiest shot that ever brought a tiger down."

"You won't stand by me, then?"

"Stand by and see you shot? No."

"Then I must find some one else, that's all."

"Felix, don't be an ass. And yet—" He suddenly paused.

"Well?"

"Damn it, I can't tell you why. But you mustn't be the man to shoot Cram Warden, even supposing that he didn't shoot you. There are reasons—I have it! You mustn't: but there's no reason why I shouldn't shoot him fifty times over; or if he shoots me, why, then, as you say, *tong mew*. What do you say? Shall I try my luck?"

"I wish you would be serious for once."

"And so I am—in sober seriousness."

"Of course I could not think of such a thing for a moment. Then you will not carry my message?"

"No, by God! not a fraction of it. I'm not a gentleman, and I don't pretend to be one. You will fight, of course I can't help it."

How Barton finished his sentence Felix never knew. Before he knew the cause he felt his heart beating violently; and though he turned mechanically towards the door, a kind of faintness prevented his seeing any thing but vacancy. His senses were acute enough; but on this occasion his heart was quicker still.

It was Marie!

Of this alone he was conscious. All other facts vanished away into imperceptible nothingness—the place, the mystery of her disappearance, the strange companionship in which he found her again. The soul's love is in itself a dream; and in dreams, they say, one never feels surprise.

She herself stood in the doorway, without resolution either to advance or to retire. Indeed it would have been useless to retire, now that she had been seen by him from whom she had been seeking to fly. Barton, who had been speaking warmly, had not heard her step upon the stairs, which had indeed been too light to be heard by the ears of any but one. But he suddenly looked up, and saw what the reader has also seen.

He stopped abruptly, and there was silence for a full minute. Then he spoke again.

"Esther—Miss Lefort—this is not my doing, though I am glad it has happened. Felix found me out, and—"

But he was unheard. Felix had broken from his dream, and was by her side. Barton looked at them both once more, and sighed deeply, and then for a moment turned away.

"Marie! my own Marie!" exclaimed Felix at last; "heaven has sent me to you—nothing can part us now!"

Would it have been wonderful if she also lost her sense of right and wrong—if she also had seen the hand of God in this chance meeting?

As it was, she could scarcely speak. "O my God!" she at last exclaimed, "am I never to find peace—never to be forgotten? And you—can not you have mercy upon me?"

Their companion, whose presence both had forgotten, began to drum upon the window-pane. Then he turned round, and spoke.

"You seem to have got yourselves both into a mess—and I for one see no way out of it except by giving some one we know of ratsbane. But how about the duel now, Felix? Don't look so scared, Miss Lefort—I beg your pardon—Esther. That seems to be a worse mess still."

"Marie," said Felix, "it is true. I have challenged your husband, and he has accepted the challenge. That is what Barton means."

"I beg your pardon, that is not by any means what Barton means—at least not the whole of it. I could scarcely have prevented your fighting before, without betraying confidence, but now—"

Felix certainly found himself in a horribly awkward position. To fight a duel with Marie's husband, she still living, was obviously impossible: it was equally impossible for him to betray her existence to him, which, since he had himself discovered it by accident, would amount to a breach of confidence: and to withdraw without sufficient reason would be to stamp himself as a coward, and to justify the opinion that Warden entertained of him as an impostor, when he had claimed to be of gentle blood.

Barton went on. "What do you say, Felix? You had better have accepted my offer—you know what I mean."

"I see no way out of it but one," he answered.

"And that is—I guess what you mean. Here are three poor devils—by God! I think we had better subscribe for a few pennyworth of charcoal, after the fashion of your country. Besides, we should be doing a little good for once in our lives—the air of Lambeth smells feverish, and charcoal, they say, is a disinfectant."

"Barton, I believe you would joke on the day of judgment."

"My dear fellow, don't you know me yet? Laughing is my way of crying—that's all. If I were one of your lucky ones, I believe I should never make a joke again. It isn't your Mark Wardens that laugh—it's the shorn lamb that skips and plays, even when it sees the butcher. But what, then, is your one way?"

"My way at present leads away from you—but not in the way you mean. Good-bye, my friend, who have been a brother to me—be a brother to her also. Good-bye, Marie: you are right, we must part forever. And do not fear for me, or for any one. I have loved you so dearly! Dearest, those who love as we do can not part forever. One day we shall meet again. Till then—"

But Marie threw herself into the doorway.

"No, Felix," she said, in a clear and firm voice, "you shall commit no sin for me. You are a brave man; you must not act like a coward."

Both started. It was not the Marie whom they had known that now spoke.

"It is I," she said, "who have brought about all this misery and all this sin. Yes, I mean it—it is I. And I will stand here until I am obeyed now, unless you choose to force your way by killing me first. I know the way you mean—it is to kill or to be killed—or both, perhaps. Will you listen to me?"

She paused, and then went on.

"In a good cause, I, the daughter of a French soldier, would not seek to keep back him I loved the best from certain death—or worse, from the certain shedding of the blood of another. But in a bad cause, I would rather that the whole world should call him coward than that I should have to think him weak or base. I vow, though I am a Christian woman, and though I have already seen death face to face, that your death, whether by your own hands or by those of my husband, or the death of my husband by yours, shall be my own. Nothing shall keep me from it—no, not Ernest or Fleurette. If you fear the world's scorn, do as I have done: the world is wide, and this one spot of it will no more miss Felix Créville than they have missed Marie Lefort. But I think better things of you than to think you would fear any scorn of men when undeserved. You will be strong in your own conscience; and there is one, at least, who the more you are scorned by those who do not know you will love you all the more. Yes—who will love you. There is no harm in saying so now. For my sake, let me have the consolation in my desolate life that he whom I love is a brave and true man."

"Oh, Marie, how unworthy I am to dare to love you! If you could share my fate—and why should you not? If we are both dead to the world—"

"That is impossible. You do not even tempt me. If I am in my heart to love a brave man, you must also love a pure woman. We must be worthy of one another. If you are brave and true for my sake, I must be true and pure for yours."

"Then I am to revoke this challenge—I, a De Croisville? Marie—do you not understand that a man's honor is his life?"

"Such honor as that? No. Once more, I have said it. It is not your life I wish to save—it is your true honor, and my own love."

Felix bowed his eyes to the ground. The contest in him was bitter, but it could have but one ending.

"Curse it all!" said Barton, after a long pause. "I suppose it must be so; but—that that infernal scoundrel should get his own way, after all!"

CHAPTER XIV.

AND so at last the curtain had fallen. It seems time formally to turn off the lights, to dismiss the audience, and to roll up the green carpet that used to be the outward symbol of a tragedy.

For although all the actors had remained alive at the close, it was a real tragedy that had been played. Two souls had found each other only to learn that their mutual recognition, which should by rights have made the common life of both, hitherto so wasted, whole and complete, meant the final certainty that their separate lives were to be wasted without hope until the end. To natures like theirs, untrained and undeadened by the ordinary experience of the world, longing for completeness and incomplete in themselves, this vain vision of what might have been is a very climax of tragedy. It may be that there are some who need no double soul; and if, as some hold, there is for each one of us a double soul created somewhere in the world, it is very certain that it is given to very few to find theirs. To these—to those, that is to say, who need it not, and to those who do not know their need—the tragedy may seem to have but a tame *dénouement*. But those who have had the rare chance to meet with and to recognize that which has been created for them, whether in time or not in time, will not consider actual death essential to the idea of a tragic close. And yet there is something worse even than this.

Things are not to be measured by the space that they fill in the world, any more than lives are to be measured by the mere flux of hours and days. Every one of us is the centre of the world to himself: and it is his own illusions and hopes and memories—not outward facts—that form the real world of every one. Hugh Lester was as much the centre of the world as the greatest man who ever filled it with the greatest deeds; and his illusions were over. Nor was he one of those dreamers to whom illusion succeeds to illusion, and to whom, when one is dead, another is born. He had staked his whole happiness upon what he now suddenly waked to find the emptiest of dreams. Miss Clare had been right, after all. But life is not altogether like a stage. Even when the play is played out, its lights are never turned off, its audience never

dismissed, and its curtain never let fall. Other actors remained, besides Hugh, Felix, and Marie, who still had something left to do.

Warden waited quietly in his chambers all day, as he had promised: but Felix never came, nor any message from him. Then he went according to his appointment to dine with his friend Major Andrews, and discussed the whole affair. Of course he gave his own version of the story, telling just as much—or rather just as little—of it as he pleased: so that the only question left open was whether he had acted rightly in admitting the claim of his opponent to be treated by him on equal terms. The Major certainly held that, considering the social position of the so-called Marquis—and, though he did not say so, of Warden also—the last resort of gentlemen would in such a case be rather a farce than a tragedy, in which he, for his own part, having regard to his own dignity and reputation, would rather not be an actor.

But he consented to go back with Warden to his chambers to see if any thing had happened in the absence of the latter; and was much disappointed to find that a gentleman had called about half an hour since, and was still waiting for Warden's return. But his brow cleared when, on accompanying Warden into the sitting-room, he saw Hugh Lester, with whom he had been slightly acquainted. If a man of his undoubted position and character was willing to act for Felix it gave the matter a different aspect, and made it possible for himself, with a good social conscience, to act for Warden.

Hugh was looking wretchedly pale and ill. He was the mere ghost of the young man who had held the reins from Redchester to Earl's Dene but a few months ago. He rose when Warden entered, but did not hold out his hand.

"Mr. Warden," he said, coldly, "I dare say you are surprised to see me."

"I confess, Lester; but I am glad to see you, all the same. Won't you sit down again? Major Andrews—Mr. Lester."

"We have met before, I think, Major. I have two matters that I have come about. In the first place—"

"Am I *de trop*?" asked the Major. "Because, if so—"

"Not at all. In the first place, there are stories going about about the disappearance of Miss Lefort."

"With which I am connected. I know it. I presume you scarcely give credit to the crazy fancies of a mad French fiddler?"

"Pardon me—I will come to that presently. There is no evidence to connect you in any serious manner with her disappearance—"

"Thank you. I presume you mean that you do not think me a murderer. That is very kind of you."

"But, if she is not dead, you must see that it is to your interest to help in tracing her out."

"I would help to find the poor girl gladly. But what can I do?"

"Nothing, of course, if you know nothing. I would rather not explain myself more fully. But you know that Miss Raymond is an old friend of mine; and that than my aunt she has no nearer friends."

"My dear fellow, I do know nothing. And I do wish you would explain yourself."

"By all means, if you wish it. I hear that she—Miss Lefort, I mean—says she is married to you."

"She said so? And to whom, pray?"

"To Monsieur de Créville."

"That madman again! By God, Lester, I think it more than strange that you should take his word against mine! You seem offended with me for some unknown cause which I will not try to guess; but is that a reason for doubting the honor of one who has always tried to be your friend?"

"I have every reason to believe the word of Monsieur de Créville until it is disproved."

"And it is disproved, I hope, by my denial."

"Surely," said the Major.

"No one," Warden went on, "can prove a negative. It is for Monsieur Créville to prove his words—not for me."

"I am no match for you in logic," said Hugh. "But this I do say, that until the fate of Miss Lefort is discovered, I have quite enough reason, upon the authority of Monsieur de Créville, to do all I can to prevent Miss Raymond from making a fatal mistake."

"This is insufferable! Miss Raymond is her own mistress—though what she has to do with the matter I am at a loss to conceive."

"It was you who asked me for explanations—not I who offered them."

"And I feel honored by them, I assure you. But as to this Créville. Has he only to say a thing to be believed?"

"Such a story as his at all events requires investigation."

"I tell you what, Lester, you have said enough to provoke any one who wishes you less well than I do. But I will not be provoked in this manner by you. I declare to you, on the honor of a gentleman, that I know nothing whatever about Miss Lefort more than all the world knows, and that this fellow Créville is either mad or lies. For my own part I believe the latter. He knows my opinion of him, and I am expecting a message from him even now."

"You expect a challenge from him?"

"I have already received one."

Here Major Andrews interrupted.

"Mr. Lester," he said, "perhaps you can be of service here. I have been trying to persuade our friend Warden that he is in no way obliged—expected, I may say—to take notice of such a challenge."

Hugh was silent for a moment. Then he said, "I beg your pardon, Major. You know me well enough, I hope, to respect my opinion in such a matter?"

The Major shrugged his shoulders. "Well, you can scarcely have my experience," he replied.

"But I mean as to whether any friend of mine ought to be treated as a gentleman or no."

"Oh, certainly—of course."

"Then I so far vouch for Monsieur de Créville, that a challenge from him ought to be as much considered as one from me or you."

"Indeed! And who, pray, is this mysterious Monsieur Créville?"

"I know, absolutely, that he is what he claims to be: that, in spite of his position, he is of as good birth as any of us here, probably of better. You have heard of the Marquis de Cré-

ville of the French Revolution? This is his son."

It was now Warden who interrupted.

"The bastard son, you mean," he said, contemptuously. "Not, of course, that that makes any difference in this affair."

The blood rushed to Lester's face at once.

"Warden," he said, warmly, "Heaven knows what you mean in what you are doing, or how it is that you know as much as you appear to know. But in what you say I do understand what you mean—and, whatever has happened, I have a right to resent it."

"You are a strange fellow. My meaning is perfectly clear."

"Only too clear. And—"

"You can not say that I speak without reason."

"I can, and I do."

It was the first lie that Hugh had told in his life, but he told it boldly.

Warden was about to reply, when a note was brought to him by his boy.

"Excuse me," he said, as he opened it. He read it deliberately, and then handed it to Hugh.

"Read this," he said. "You will scarcely now vouch for your friend's courage, if you can for his legitimacy. For my part, I have always, when a man has claimed to be the son of a gentleman but acted like a cur, believed his deeds rather than his words. '*Bon chat chasse de race*.'—You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

Hugh read,

"Owing to circumstances which it is impossible to explain, M. de Croisville begs to inform Mr. Warden that he feels himself bound to withdraw his offer of a meeting between them, and will henceforth not trouble Mr. Warden with any further correspondence on the subject."

He stared in angry amazement, and no wonder.

"What do you think of your friend now?" asked Warden, as he took the note from his hands and gave it to the Major.

"I'll tell you what I think," said the latter.

"The fiddler has thought discretion the better part of valor—and so far he has proved himself a wiser man than you."

But amazed and angry as Hugh might be, however recreant to his birth his cousin might prove, it was not for him to let the family honor, that now seemed to have been driven back into its last stronghold, die altogether without a last struggle.

"Major," he said, "you evidently know nothing whatever of the matter, or you would speak differently. I will still answer for Monsieur de Créville as a gentleman and as a man of honor, in spite of all appearances."

"I hope so," said Major Andrews. "But, meanwhile, I have a sort of habit of judging by what I see."

"Indeed?" asked Warden. "A gentleman and a man of honor insults me in a room full of ladies, threatens me, bullies me into fighting, and then, at the last moment, sneaks off without an apology!"

"Warden," Hugh answered, "you know, quite as well as I do, that we are not speaking about what we seem to speak. I can see that you know more than I should have supposed; and you

must see that it is not the honor of Monsieur de Créville that is in question, but the honor of—"Miss Clare," he should have added, but stopped short.

"I have heard something strange, certainly—so strange that you must be out of your senses to speak as you do. Do you, Miss Clare's own nephew, her nearest relation, her probable heir, seriously mean to say that you, of all people in the world, hold this fiddler, as the Major calls him, to be any thing but an impostor?"

"What has that to do with it? I mean to say that I, Hugh Lester, am so convinced that Monsieur de Créville is no impostor, that I am convinced that he can be no coward and no liar either."

"Major," said Warden, "do you hear?"

"Perfectly. Mr. Lester has put a clear alternative, so far as I understand the matter—which I confess I don't altogether. But it seems to me that he means that either the fiddler lies or—"

"No," said Warden, interrupting him hastily, "I do not mean that." He certainly did not intend to mix himself up in another affair from which he could derive no possible advantage, and with Lester, of all men. Not that he would have been sorry could Hugh also have been quietly put out of the way by some fortunate accident.

"Nor did I," said Hugh, quietly. "But what I wish to say is this, Major. I speak to you as Warden's friend, and I hope not otherwise than as mine. There is far more in this matter than you or any third person can possibly be aware of, and I am sorry that it is quite impossible for me to explain it to you or to any one. Warden knows what I mean, and that is enough. I consider that he has said what ought, in the opinion of any man of honor, to oblige me, if Monsieur Créville, for good reasons of his own, refuses to fight, to take his place, unless Mr. Warden makes a full and satisfactory apology to him and to myself."

"Good God!" exclaimed Warden: "I apologize to you for having been insulted by M. de Créville?"

"In the name of the devil—this is the most complicated business I ever saw!" exclaimed the Major. "Surely—"

"No," replied Hugh to Warden, "that is mere quibbling. You know what I mean as well as I know it myself."

"You mean that you feel the honor of the Lesters insulted when I call this fellow a bastard? If so—"

"And do you apologize or no?"

"My dear fellow!"

"I am waiting."

"Do you mean to say—"

"Do you apologize or no?"

"Just think—how can I? I appeal to you, Major."

"Then all I can say is that you must consider me a substitute for Monsieur de Créville. You will hear from me again, unless I hear from you in the course of to-morrow. Good-evening."

CHAPTER XV.

HUGH was stung to the very heart. He had already fancied that he had lost his last illusion. But now he found that yet one more had been left to go, and that that also was now gone. The dream that he was loved even as he loved had gone, and that of itself was bitter enough to bear. He had always more or less wondered, after the manner of such men as he, who are ready to give all things but who claim nothing that is not strictly their due, how it could be that so divine a being as Angélique, who only wanted wings to be a real angel, should have condescended from her native sky to one who felt himself to be so much below her in all things—in mind, in courage, and in self-sacrifice: and yet, now that his wonder had become justified, and the angel had actually found her wings and flown away, the waking from his dream was no less sudden and no less harsh. Still the death of love need not mean the death of faith in all that remains, at least in a healthy nature, to which its own self is not the whole world. But then, in that interview with Miss Clare, had taken place, not the mere waking from a dream, but the sudden and violent uprooting of all the beliefs and associations of his whole life—of what are far more to a man than his body or his brain. What a lie and a mockery the world must be if the life of her who had always seemed to him so consistent, so strong, so complete in herself, so entirely real in all that she seemed—*tota, teres atque rotunda*—had been, after all, as inconsistent, as weak, as incomplete, as unreal, as hollow as he had fancied it the reverse! And where, too, as illustrated in the person of Warden, were gratitude and the friendship of man for man—the most perfect human relation that can exist short of that perfect form of love that is so rare as scarcely to deserve to be taken practically into account? And where, in the person of Felix, was that which he himself, though of course unconsciously, set above love, friendship, and faith—the sense of private honor that, by making a man accountable to himself and to his own ideas of duty, renders him a gentleman? If all the rest had gone, he could still have believed in the natural nobility of blood: and now blood, even that which flowed in his own veins, had proved itself to be no better than ditch-water. In a word, his whole creed was shattered; and though his own sense of duty remained—or he would have ceased to be Hugh Lester—it remained, in truth, only in the same way that a member of a persecuted religion, whom reason has rendered false to it in heart, clings to it still before the world simply because it happens to be down. Every woman might be false and unchaste, every man a coward; but the world must not be permitted to say, even with justice, that the Clares of Earl's Dene were no exceptions to the rule.

On that June day, which now seemed so long ago, on which he had travelled down to Earl's Dene in order to stand for Parliament, he had been a believer in all things—seeming and being had been the same. Now, friendship, love, and all the pleasantness of the world—and the world to those who believe in it, can be very pleasant indeed—had passed from him, and had left life as poor, and as hard, and as barren to him as to Felix himself, whose whole career had consisted

of a continual loss of illusion after illusion. Even his outward misfortunes, heavy as they had been, he had been able to bear with a brave if not with a light heart, vexing himself far more for his wife's sake than for his own. But then he had been upheld by the power of a great love, for which he had proved himself willing and able to sacrifice all other things, and by an intense belief in the glory of that gift of gentle blood of which no outward circumstances, however hostile, could deprive him. He must always be a gentleman by right of birth, even as he was the husband of the divinest woman in the universe by right of good fortune. It was not, of course, that he felt this consciously, but as a part of his very nature. But when Angélique had dealt her cruel blow—cruel to a degree that would have seemed inconceivable to her—blows had set in to rain apace, on the principle that it never rains but it pours.

In a word, his love had proved a dream that had passed, his friendship but a shadow that remained. His intense belief in Miss Clare as in a higher nature, had had to transform itself into compassion for a mere woman, frail and incomplete as others are: and now, what was blood, after all, when the very head of his own house, the only son of Miss Clare herself, had proved himself a coward?

But, even so, his faith fought hard. Even as the nature of Marie had a last citadel in its purity, as that of Felix in its love, so had that of Hugh a last citadel in his sense of duty. It was this sense of duty, apart from any claim of corresponding rights, that, from the beginning of this history had always, in all things that he had done, acted as the invisible worker of the machine; and it was this that, when the machine was shattered, was left visible among the fragments.

That, in the form which circumstances had compelled it to take, it was exaggerated, that it was distorted, that it was un-Christian, if you will, may be conceded. But the world has always conspired to honor it all the same. Whatever men may say, the man who acts, though blindly, upon principle, however false the principle upon which he acts in itself may be, has always been held to merit well; and while there is no need to impute to Hugh Lester any extraordinary merit—he himself would have been the last to understand any such imputation—it is not for those who, like most of us, are made in far too complex a fashion to be capable of acting, at least consistently, upon any principle at all, to throw stones. It is not, at least, for those who are incapable of following his example, to return a verdict of *felo-de-se* against the suicide of Utica. Rather we must allow that the world, as well as the Church, has a "noble army of martyrs" of its own.

Hugh was one who would have stabbed himself like Cato, and plunged into the gulf like Curtius. But he was not a philosopher: he only felt and acted. And it was his duty now—at least so it seemed to him—in the faith of his own dead belief in all other things, to take upon himself to maintain before the world the truth of that in which he had himself ceased to believe. The day of Earl's Dene was over, but it must not set in disgrace; and if its heir showed himself unworthy, it must be for himself to shield such unworthiness from all other eyes. The day was at

hand when Felix Créville would find himself master of Earl's Dene; and, as it seemed likely, would also find himself, at the same time, unable to hold up his head among men of honor. Felix must reap the reward, but it must be for Hugh to bear the burden and the heat of the day.

The wisdom of all this is another matter. But, wise or not wise, he was at all events a real man, of an uncomplex and straightforward nature, who was what he was, and could only act in one way. With the addition of brains, it is such men alone by whom the greatest things are done; and it was not his own fault that he had not yet had time to acquire the good sense of experience, or that he had not been born with the genius that more than supplies the place of it.

In bitterness of spirit, not for himself, but for others—in the very throes of the acquisition of the experience that he needed—he was slowly returning to the home from which he felt only too bitterly that the light had vanished forever, with his eyes cast down in shame for the new disgrace that, in his opinion, had fallen upon his name, and scarcely seeing where he was going, when he ran full against a man who was blind to his road for an exactly opposite reason—for the reason that he was walking along at full speed, with his eyes fixed, not upon the spot of vacancy that lies upon the ground, but upon that which lies a thousand leagues away. Each begged the other's pardon simultaneously, and the latter was proceeding on his way, when Hugh, who was easily roused from a reverie by any outward circumstance, however slight, and had looked up, suddenly said,

"I beg your pardon, sir—are you not Monsieur Créville?"

"That is my name, certainly."

"I thought so. I am Mr. Lester—you know my name, no doubt. Would you let me walk on with you? I have something to say to you."

"Mr. Lester?" asked the other, with a bow; "I ought to have recognized you. I am in a hurry—but—"

"I should be really obliged," Hugh interrupted him, with a coldness that was intended to be polite, but was in reality any thing but what he intended.

"Could you say it to me now?"

"I am sorry to delay you, if you have any thing to do—but the matter is of the most pressing importance. I should have come to you if I had known where you lived."

"I am going home now. If it is not going out of your way, would you come in my direction? I am afraid I can offer you no hospitality, but—"

"Do not mention it," said Hugh. "That will be the best way—the street is not the best place for talking in. I will keep what I have to say till we arrive. You will be alone?"

"Quite alone."

The two young men, so nearly related, yet so different in all essential things, walked on in silence, each absorbed in his own thoughts, till they reached the lodgings of Felix. It was late, and the household had retired, so that there was no fear of their being disturbed, for Felix was never troubled with visitors of the night-bird order. They had to grope their way up stairs in the dark; and when Felix struck a light, after a long search for matches, Hugh saw that the room

in which he found himself was littered all over with the preparations that a careless man makes for a long journey.

"I can at all events offer you a chair," said Felix, in a tone of intense weariness. "You see that I am on the eve of a journey."

"You are leaving England?"

"For good."

Hugh had of course seen Felix before, but had never had occasion to observe him carefully, or even to notice him at all. Now, however, he looked at him with an interest that may be conceived.

He was no physiognomist, and he was prejudiced; so no wonder he was puzzled. The face that he saw was worn and weary, but it was calm, and grave, and resolute: the face of a man who had fought many a hard battle with life, and had lost indeed, but lost with honor—not that of a man who feared to risk so small a thing as life now seemed to Hugh. Indeed, for that matter, it looked like the face of a man who would hold his life even more cheaply than he. But the foreign air and the general tone with which the artist-life stamps a man so indelibly and so unmistakably, confirmed him in his prejudice. Could this be the son of Miss Clare?

And yet it was plainly so. Strong emotion, like death itself, calls forth hidden resemblances that would otherwise never be suspected. Hugh had seen Miss Clare in the calm that follows mental suffering: and he was startled by a similarity of expression that made the very features seem the same.

Felix appeared to be in no hurry to learn the nature of Hugh's communication. He first of all sat down, and then, suddenly rising, lighted a cigar, and offered another to Hugh.

"They are not very good, I am afraid," he said; "but I can give you a pipe if you prefer it. You are in Bohemia here, you know," he continued, with an attempt at a smile—the very smile that he had seen upon Miss Clare's lips when he had last parted from her.

Hugh found it difficult to begin what he had to say; and yet he was ashamed that he should be obliged to treat with courtesy one whom he held to be so little worthy to be treated even with ordinary respect.

"No, thank you," he said, coldly. "You know who I am? I am the nephew of Miss Clare. You know something of her?"

"I have seen her."

"I hear you have challenged Mr. Warden to fight a duel?"

"Ah—you come on his part?"

"Not exactly, though I come from him. Am I right?"

"Perfectly. Why do you ask?"

"Because I hear that you have changed your mind."

"That is so also."

"To his great surprise. Have you any objection to let me know why?"

"Yes—the greatest."

"Suppose, then, that I am come on his part. He says that you insulted him publicly, that you forced a duel upon him, and that now, without giving any reason, you refuse to meet him. Is that true?"

"Quite true."

Certainly the previous astonishment of Hugh

was nothing to his astonishment at this cool admission.

"You know," he asked, "what you will oblige people to think?"

"Certainly I do. But it will matter very little to me what people say of an obscure musician, or what they think either. I shall be out of reach."

"And you claim to be—"

"Excuse me—I claim to be nothing. Is that all you have to say?"

"You—the son of—of a French gentleman, will submit to be called—"

"A coward, you would say? Yes—if people choose to call me so."

Hugh looked at him as a specimen of some new species of animal. This was something more than the ordinary thick-bided cowardice of one who preferred his skin to his honor. But he could not allow the head of his house so to disgrace himself without making one effort more.

"You will wonder," he said, "since such are your sentiments, why I, who certainly hold others, mix myself up in such an affair?"

"Not the least. You are a friend of Warden's, I suppose."

"And you will give no explanation?"

"I have none to give. I do not choose to fight—that is all."

"Nor apologize?"

"That least of all."

"Mr. Créville," said Hugh, "I do not come as a friend of Mr. Warden. I come on my own account—to tell you simply that you *must* go on with this affair—or I. And that whether you are afraid or no."

Felix flushed up with a sudden anger—but it died away as soon as it came.

"Or you?" he asked, in involuntary surprise.

"Or I. It is your duty to carry this through—not for the sake of your own honor, for which it seems you do not very much care, but for the sake of that of others. In a very few years' time—however long it may be—"

He paused, in doubt as to whether he should continue or no. Then he went on:

"Yes, I must speak—it is necessary. Listen to me, and then withdraw your challenge if you please."

Felix looked at him, but with little curiosity. He felt like one whose life is over, and who can never be surprised or interested again.

"There was once a lady," began Hugh, "who lived her whole life long in a country neighborhood doing good to those about her, and looked up to by the whole country round. She had been married very young, but circumstances had led her to retain her maiden name, and to let her marriage remain unknown. But that was from no fault of hers. Among other of her good deeds, she took up and warmly befriended a man of talent, who through her found a career. This man, however, for Heaven knows what end of his own, thought fit to slander his benefactress—to say, in fact, that her marriage had been no marriage, and that her only son—of whose existence she had till then been ignorant—was a bastard. Do you follow me?"

Felix felt his heart sink within him—certainly not from fear, but from a strange presentiment—strange beyond expression.

"What," Hugh continued, "would be the

plain duty of that son—how should he act, if not for his own sake, but for—”

“Explain yourself, for God’s sake!” exclaimed Felix. “Do you mean—” He rose suddenly from his seat, and his heart was beating rapidly.

“Surely not, even if the slander were as true as it is false, to sit down and let it go, as it needs must, forth to the world—surely not, having once challenged the slanderer, to admit its truth by withdrawing his challenge without explanation?”

“Monsieur!” cried Felix, heeding but one thing, “you know my mother?”

“Yes—at least I thought so, till this strange conduct of yours made me refuse to think you any son of hers—any kinsman of mine.”

“And who is she, then? is it possible? *Grand Dieu!*”

“Tell me first that you are her son.”

“Ah, you may trust me—you may be at ease. But tell me—”

Hugh saw how his eyes flashed, how his calmness had changed into earnestness.

“You must have guessed already,” he answered, “that I am speaking of my aunt, Miss Clare—of the Marchioness of Croisville.”

“And she knows it? She knows—”

“Every thing.”

The face of Felix fell. “She is my mother—and she has not sent for me.”

“She has but just learned it.”

“You come from her, then?”

Hugh was embarrassed. He was satisfied; but he could not find it in his heart to tell this man, who had been for a moment buoyed up by the instinctive hope that nature, who had denied him happiness, had of her own free will bestowed upon him something better still, that the new hope was as vain as the old.

Plenty of fine things have been said about the relation of mother and child—so many that there is but little left to say. Seeing that its presence or its absence has been of necessity felt by every soul that has ever lived, there is, moreover, no reason why it should be discussed as a matter of psychology. It would be as reasonable as to talk truisms about hunger and thirst—the only other needs which, in their existence and in their phenomena, are common to all mankind. There is no one who requires to be taught any thing new about any of these things, for there is no one who does not feel in his own person all that there is to say. But the highest praise that can be bestowed upon this relation is this, that its need and its power are felt most strongly by those who have never consciously known it, or who, having known it, have lost it. When it exists, it exists after the manner of the air, of which the presence, when it surrounds us, is scarcely regarded; when it does not exist, it is felt like the absence of air. Love is like some beautiful foreign atmosphere, of which every wave fills the soul that breathes it with new wonder at every breath; but the affection of the child for the mother is, in every sense—in the most metaphorical as well as in the most literal—the very air of home, which contains no elements of wonder, no strange revelations, which may even pall and weary, but which fills him who is exiled from it with desires that are calm only because they are deep, because they belong to his very nature. And to him who, like Felix, has never known it at all, it is even more. It

seems to be not only a part of his nature, as in the case of other men, but to be filled also with the unknown wonder that belongs to the passion of love itself. It is to him also home—but it is a home that he has never seen; it is as though he were some native of the South or of the East, with an imagination steeped in the beauty which belongs to him none the less because that beauty belongs not to his eyes—none the less because he has himself from his birth upward been a sojourner in Thule—in it, but not of it. It becomes to him the blending of passion with calm affection, of actual excitement with the idea of perfect rest—an unknown land, full of the promise of all that the soul desires. He can know nothing of the evil that enters into every human relation, however perfect; on the contrary, he sees a heaven in what to those who have lived in it all their lives is often mere earth against which their souls not seldom rebel. It is when we are by the waters of Babylon that we sit down and weep over the thought of the Zion that has been or that ought to have been ours. To the actual dweller in Palestine the land of his race doubtless appears dull and tame enough, with no greater gifts of honey or milk than belong to any other country in the world; but to him of the dispersion, whose bodily eyes have never seen it, however much his ears may have heard, it becomes, in the eyes of his imagination, a land flowing with milk and honey indeed.

And they who happen to know what to a Frenchman, above all other men in the world, is contained in the words “*ma mère*,” will understand what Felix, this more than half Frenchman, felt when he found himself on the very border of the land which he had desired all the more for never having had even so much as its promise. The idea of all that to the Teutonic mind is contained in that “blessed Teutonic word, home,” is to the Latin race contained in the no less blessed word “mother,” whether they translate it into *madre* or *mère*; and to a good Catholic, as in faith, at least, was Felix, who prays not only to his heavenly Father but to his heavenly mother also, the idea of maternity has a significance greater still. Even Hugh, who was by no means of an imaginative turn, and who took things practically after his fashion, could not help for once being borne behind the scenes. He felt himself to be a usurper of what was not his own, and that he was depriving Felix of far more than that of which Felix was depriving him. It was he who would in effect have been the loser if their respective conditions had been reversed, and if he, instead of Felix, had been declared the heir, and Felix, instead of himself, had been made the son.

Lost in this new idea, not the less strong because unconscious, Felix forgot all else for the moment. He did not even think of asking her history. What are past outside facts to present emotion? He would as soon have thought of asking the Holy Mother herself for her passport had she deigned to visit him in person.

“And where shall I find her?” he asked; “when will she see me?”

“She has left London by now,” Hugh answered: “she is gone home—down to Denethorp. But—well we must be brothers also.” All his doubt had vanished: the heart of Felix was to be read in his eyes. “I am her son too,” he

continued—"your younger brother. And so we must consult together. Before we think of ourselves, we must think how to defend her. And first of all, how comes it that you, you of all men—a De Croisville, a Clare—should seem to be acting the part of—There must be some good reason. I have never believed—"

His calmness, though rather of speech than of spirit, brought back Felix to the earth from the skies. It was too true—he would not face his mother, his father's wife, until he had done what he could to defend her honor. Otherwise, he would come before her, not as her son, but as himself her slanderer, her accuser.

"That I am a coward, you would say? Well if you had—but you are right. Yes—even she would absolve me now—would hold that I risk my life in a good cause, such as even she would approve. And I shall have no difficulty in finding a second now?"

He held out his hand, which Hugh took gladly.

"Thanks!" replied the latter. "I will return to Warden to-morrow: I will ask you not a single question more. I see that you have guessed her slanderer without my naming him. Are you a good shot?"

Felix shrugged his shoulders.

"Have you ever been out before?"

"Never."

"Well, then," said Hugh, with all the superior air of a man who has stood at his twelve paces over one who has never passed his baptism of fire, "I must tell you what to do. For the present we understand one another—that is enough for now. I will arrange every thing. You will be here to-morrow?"

"Of course—all day. But do not be long. The sooner this is over the better. And if any thing should happen—"

"Nonsense—nothing will happen—at least nothing that you mean. You will live happily all the rest of your days, as the story-books say." A strange look came into his eyes, which it was hard to read. "My dear fellow—brother, I ought to call you now—promise me one thing, will you? All sorts of accidents happen, you know—I mean to leave England shortly. When I do so, I rely upon your being to my—to our mother all that I ought to have been. And forgive me for having deprived you of your own for so long. You must not be jealous of me—I am far from having deserved what I have had. But you must deserve it—and that you will, I feel sure."

He once more held out his hand.

"Leave England?" asked Felix. "Why?"

"Yes; do you not know—but what does it matter why? There are plenty of reasons, and I have always thought that a colonial life would suit me best. One's hands are good for something out there. And—as I have no intention of returning immediately—do you promise?"

"With all my heart—whether you go or no."

"And you forgive me?"

"No—I thank you for having been to her what I have not been able to be—what you must be to her still. But—"

He paused. Then, "I scarcely know how to say it," he went on; "but since you speak of emigrating—"

"Well? Is there any thing strange in the idea?"

"To put it plainly—I know nothing of your laws—but I am doing you no injury?"

"Doing me an injury! How so?"

"I will not come between you and her in any way. I will be to her but one son the more. But it is you who are her eldest son, not I, who am now but just born. You shall not be poorer by me, either in affection or in—"

"Oh," interrupted Hugh, "that's all right. You needn't be afraid in that way."

"You are quite sure?"

"I give you my word."

"It is not because of me that you leave England?"

"Not the least in the world. Does my letting you know of your birth look like it? Do men run against their own interest like that? And now, if you please, I will take a cigar."

He smiled as he spoke. But the smile belied the words—at least so it seemed to Felix. Then with another cordial pressure of the hand, the two cousins, or rather brothers, bade each other good-night, and Hugh Lester once more went on his way. A load was off his mind, and he could once more breathe freely, although he had now told his second lie.

CHAPTER XVI.

So Hugh Lester was relieved in mind, so far as regarded the safety of the last citadel of his social creed. That was safe. But otherwise the complications that surrounded it, like the intrenchments of a besieging army, had only made the position of the garrison more insecure. In plainer words, his duty never to surrender while life still remained in him, was rendered a hundred times clearer to him than even before. He had been willing to fight for the honor of Earl's Dene, more dear to him by far than Earl's Dene itself, as a matter of duty when the spirit of loyalty had departed: now, the enthusiasm of loyalty had revived, and he was to do battle not only for the creed that he professed, but for his belief in his creed—for living persons as well as for dead ideas.

His motives, for one of his naturally straightforward nature, had become terribly complex; and none the less so in that he made not the slightest attempt to unravel them. There is nothing so difficult as the attempt to put into words the opposing elements that direct the conduct of one who himself is incapable of self-analysis—of winnowing his own chaff from his own corn. Doubtless, to one who had loved so well and had lost, and worse than lost, so utterly, life did not seem particularly worth keeping; and therefore, in such a man, the risk of life for the sake of others is scarcely in itself particularly deserving of praise. But still the mere instinct of self-preservation, in a young and healthy man, is so strong by its very nature, that however worthless life itself may seem, the innate desire to retain it does not really, in practice, lose any of its real influence. It does not occur to men like Hugh Lester, strong in body and sound in mind, to actively court death because life has betrayed them. Disgust with life may indeed aid the spirit of self-sacrifice: but the spirit of self-sacrifice is none the less divine for being aided by a

mere earthly influence. On the contrary, a touch of earth renders humanly pathetic what else were too divinely sublime.

Felix, then, had proved himself to be a true Clare: to be in no wise wanting in the sense of honor that, in his cousin's eyes, ought to be inseparable from one who bore what to the latter was the very name of names. "*Non solum nomine Clarus*"—the motto over the iron gates of the lodge—expressed the very basis upon which any one who claimed to be a Clare should found his claim. Until he had so proved himself, it was necessary that he should be stung to the proof; but now that the proof was no longer needed, it was for Hugh to put himself to the proof still more. If the reader, as is possible, does not quite see the drift of all this, he must be content to wait for the explanation; for the conduct of men like Hugh Lester is to be explained by deeds, not words. Consciously, his whole feeling amounted to this: that it was for himself, not for Felix, to be the sacrifice, since a sacrifice seemed to be needed, to the honor of the name; and he excused himself—for what young man who is inclined to pride himself upon his common sense and freedom from sentimental nonsense will ever own even to himself that his motives savor of the heroic and of the unworldly?—on the ground that his own life had become worthless, and that it must not, under any circumstances, be open to the world to say that he had forced another into a duel in order that he might profit by his death.

And so he walked back to his home—or rather to what had been his home; for the last words of his wife had turned it into a mere place in which to feed and sleep. She had gone to bed, and he, who would have remorselessly disturbed from the sweetest of dreams one whose thoughts he believed to be his thoughts, and whose interests, of the heart as well as of outer life, to be no other than his own, now, in a sort of pity for what he felt she must herself have suffered, would not even run the risk of waking one whose ways and thoughts could never even so much as seem to be his again—and which in reality had never been his at any time. He therefore, having just glanced at her, shading the light that he held in his hand that it might not break her sleep, lay down upon a sofa in their sitting-room to wait for his own share of slumber, and his own holiday of dreams. His rest, however, was not of long duration, though fatigue and excitement made it, while it lasted, deep and sound. The earliest morning light woke him with its cold; and then he rose once more and went again into the streets—one more wanderer to swell the number of those whom bankruptcy in happiness has rendered poor. He could not stay in doors and think out his thoughts deliberately within four walls, and the hour to act his thoughts had not yet arrived.

Angélique in her turn woke also; and, in the interval between dreaming and waking, missed her husband from her side. And now ensued a phenomenon which will certainly not seem to be the less strange because it happened to be true. It is not only in the hearts of women that what is strange is true, and that what is true is strange.

The reader, it is to be feared, was never so much in love with the heroine of the first book of *this history* as he ought to have been—as Fe-

lix, the inconstant, had once been, and as Hugh, the constant, in spite of all things, was still. It has already been said, in that same first book, that the charm of a beautiful woman is a thing not to be described: and accordingly she, like many another woman who wins hearts, may have provoked a little wonder at her success in two such diverse cases. Almost every woman who is gifted by nature with her kind of influence is a standing mystery to those who by circumstance or by good fortune do not fall within it; and verbal descriptions of those who are so gifted must necessarily appear as inconsistent with the actual effect of their magic upon men as the hideous pictures of the last Queen of Scots with which art has favored us are with the actual history of her whom they represent. But this is a simple narrative of facts, not of theories: and that Angélique, who, poor girl, could neither hinder her heart from keeping all its warmth for its owner, nor her hands from grasping at the main chance, should gain the love of two men, is no more against fact, and experience, and nature, than that the face of Queen Mary, as we know it, should have gained that of scores. If the lover sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt, he may far more easily see in a stone that muscle which, for some arbitrary and traditional reason, has been accepted as the seat of the soul. But the fact is—and this is no mere truism, seeing that it is denied every day—that every woman is a woman, after all. Though the reader may not have fallen in love with Angélique, he has gone very far astray indeed if in her he has admitted the possibility of there being such a thing as a wholly consistent woman, any more than, as his own experience will doubtless tell him, there is such a thing as a wholly consistent man. Consistency is a very phoenix, that exists wholly in fiction; and since it is wholly false to nature, it should not by rights be found even there.

And as every woman is a woman, neither more nor less, Angélique, in spite of her general superiority to her sex, was, being a woman, no exception to this universal rule. She was no phoenix, though Felix and Hugh had thought her so.

Most assuredly she had spoken with her whole heart when she had called her husband a fool. What else could she think him? But there are fagots and fagots, and there are fools and fools. Insane, or rather idiotic, as his conduct had been in submitting to throw away his and her chances for a mere idea, when by playing his cards decently well he might have won every trick upon the board, still he had done what she would never have had either the strength or the courage to do; and strength and courage, even though they be exercised in folly, will have their weight even with the wise. The most sensible of women is bound to respect the most insane of men whose insanity comes from an innate power of will to do that which he ought, come what may. It is just those who have not any particular virtue that respect that particular virtue the most of all, on the same principle as that on which one of Lessing's heroines judged extravagance to be her lover's only fault, because economy was the only virtue that she had ever heard him praise. So it is the libertine who stands most in awe of the chaste nature for which he professes scorn and disbelief: and it is the weak woman, strong only in impulse, who is most impressed by the

sense of justice and of respect for the rights of others which belongs to and is the sign of a strong man. With all her contempt, with all the rebellion of her nature, Angélique unconsciously felt that she had found her master: and it may safely be said that she had never despised less than when she seemed most to despise. Even as it is womanliness—that is to say, to go to the root of the matter, purity of soul—and not outward beauty that most attracts and subdues a man, so it is manliness—that is to say, not intellect, but courage and truth—that most subdues a woman.

Love in its fullness, which is nothing else than perfect sympathy, it may be that she was incapable of feeling: that is given but to very few men or women to feel: it is the privilege of souls that dwell in a far more ethereal atmosphere than that in which it is given to most of us, and not only to Angélique, to dwell. But of that sort of love that is felt, if such things feel, by the ivy for the tree round which it climbs, she, being woman, felt the need even as other women do, whether they are capable of the higher love or no. It may safely be said that she was capable of following the greatest villain upon earth through an ocean of villainy so long as by strength he showed himself her master; and she was capable of following her master, whenever he came, even though he showed the strength, not of evil, but of a nature of which her understanding could not conceive. And now she had not only found her master, but her instinct began to tell her, though not in words that she could hear, that it was so.

And so, when she found herself awake, she also, for the first time in her life, felt herself alone.

If so gross and prosaic a comparison—gross enough and prosaic enough to be worthy of Dick Barton himself—may be pardoned in speaking of so subtle and unprosaic a thing as woman's soul, then let it be said, in the face of bathos, that indulgence in violent passion is very like indulgence in brandy: it is the precursor of a terrible next morning—all the more terrible to those who are accustomed to the water of the cold springs of life for their daily beverage. Angélique had often had her fits of ill-humor, as Marie and her poor father had well known; but she had very rarely, if ever, been in a passion before. Her scene with Warden, in which she had certainly not been herself, returned to her in any thing but pleasant colors to brighten the misty morning that filled the room; and she lay turning it over in her mind for a good half-hour, in the same way as, to continue the comparison, a man, temperate by habit, turns over when he awakes, and strives self-tormentingly to recall, the words that he spoke and the deeds he did when wine betrayed him the night before. She would have given much to have been able to rise in the light of kind eyes, and to have been able to support herself upon a strong hand.

But she arose, as she awoke, to be alone—to touch no strong hand, to meet no kind eyes, and she missed them as careless eyes miss some piece of furniture from a room that they had never noticed while it was there—some flower from the table where it has been daily placed by careful but uncared-for hands. In such a case, the feeling of want goes very deep indeed—it becomes a feeling of desire. Unconsciously, she could not but feel, and therefore could not but be

touched by, the devotion that had been hers—that might have been hers all her life long: a devotion not of weakness, not of a slave to a mistress, but of a husband to a wife. It was the waking of the instincts of the woman in her, which must have come about some time, even though they came late—even though she had begun her life, as it were, at the wrong end, and had to travel through it backward.

And so at last she rose and dressed herself, without the elaborate care that she had always been in the habit of expending upon her toilet, even when there had been no eyes to see the result of her good taste in such matters, and the artistic skill with which, even when there was scarcely a crust for breakfast—as had sometimes happened—she could still come down to the crust as if she were the lady of a great country house about to meet her guests over a breakfast à l'Ecossoise. If her husband held a creed, she had held one also; it was first, above all things, "I believe in Angélique:" it was secondly, if even secondly, "I believe in Angélique as turned out by Madame Jupon." But on this occasion she descended in a costume that was almost Bohemian in its negligence. Had Hugh been there to see, he would scarcely have believed but that the fairies, who change children at nurse, had for once taken it into their capricious heads to change a full-grown young woman. Her feeling, or rather her presentiment—for her reason by no means despaired—of failure in the great object of her life, and her sensation of loneliness when she most wished not to feel alone, had made all exertion, even the slight and habitual exertion of dressing herself becomingly in her own eyes, an impossibility. She almost felt anxiety itself: for Hugh, except when prevented by the laws of his country and the will of his creditors, had never been absent from her without good cause and ample explanation. She felt sure that something must have happened out of the common; and, in her nervous condition, no news necessarily meant ill news. She at last, having sent away her breakfast uneaten, even had to confess to herself that she feared some misfortune, not to her plans, but to him whom she had hoped to make the instrument of them, and who had deceived her hopes so unpardonably. She did not recall her own words to Hugh; she did not feel the force of the bitter words, "Too late:" she only felt a vague sense of evil that she was powerless to foresee or to prevent. Had Hugh himself been there, she would have, without even a struggle on the part of her old self-sufficiency, have yielded her sceptre to him simply because she was a woman and he a man.

But, as it was, with all her weakness growing weaker still, and with all her need for the protection of love gaining strength hour by hour, she was doomed to wait. It was in truth too late; he for whose return she now almost longed did not return. Then came a terrible fear that her chains were broken. And yet he surely could not have left her for a foolish word, the very nature of which she had herself forgotten—that she could not remember whether she had ever uttered or no? Surely the power that had gained so utterly could suffice to retain. In a word, jealousy had come to make even stronger her experience of what it means, not to be, but to feel, alone.

It was her own Nemesis, that, unless the Fates are exorable, must last not for a day, but for many days. The doom of Eve was upon her, that "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."

CHAPTER XVII.

FELIX also waited. As may well be imagined, the sleep that had come so soundly to Angélique, and so partially to Hugh, had not come in any form to him. He was in a state of nervous tension, in which it was impossible for him even to close his eyes. But though he did not dream, in the literal sense of the word, he dreamed waking dreams without number. He had the temperament which forms a perpetual link to unite the present with the past: and many things in his own nature that had often baffled the self-analysis to which he was so prone now became to him plain and clear. It seemed to him—though it was probably the result only of imagination setting in a particular direction—that he had some recollection of a beautiful and stately lady even before his first recollection of Aunt Cathon, or even of the vision of the clothes-lines from which he chose to date his birth. He tried to make his fancy in this matter square with the old lady whom he had seen, but scarcely noticed, at the house in Park Lane, and even persuaded himself that he succeeded. This new story contained for him a romance such as he had never dreamed of even in the Angélique days; as for Marie—well, he dared not let his mind wander to her more than it insisted upon doing, whether he dared or no. That was a romance no more, but a fatal reality, that made him turn to the idea of his mother as the last refuge of a heart that had been forcibly turned back upon itself; and had failed hitherto in every effort to find what it desired. He had found his soul only to lose it forever; but this new discovery seemed to his fancy, excited by the idea of what was unknown to him, as though it must needs prove a revelation to make, in some unknown way, the crooked places of his life straight, and its rough places plain.

As to the duel in which he found himself engaged, after all, he was almost inclined to be grateful to fortune that had put it in his power to come to his mother not empty-handed, but as having been chosen above all other men to be the defender of her fame. It was of course no less out of the question that his should be the hand to take the life of the husband of Marie now than it had been yesterday. But it was not necessary for him to take life: it was only necessary to risk his own, which was a very different matter. He had, as it were, only to suffer, not to do; and though suffering is in general harder than action, it was in his case a relief—it was a compromise in which every part of his duty seemed to meet, and to find mutual support. And so he positively longed impatiently for the entrance to his new life to open itself before him, though the janitor by whom the doors were to be thrown open came in the guise of Death himself. Difference of nationality, too, doubtless had something to do with the matter. Hugh, the Englishman, did not *court risk, even when risk was most indifferent to*

him; he simply accepted it, no more and no less than he would have accepted it had life been wholly a thing to be desired. But Felix, whose more nervous temperament might, were his life beautiful in his own eyes, have made him, not as a coward, but as a free chooser between good and evil, avoid death as "the terminator of delights and the separator of companions," actually made him court danger, and made him, in truth, like one of his knightly ancestors to whom "the danger's self were lure alone."

But he, no less than his old mistress, waited also for the coming of Hugh in vain. Hour after hour passed by, as he wished and dreamed, but still the expected message did not come. At last the morning grew into the afternoon, the afternoon into the evening, and found him waiting still. For aught that the day had brought him, the history of the evening before might have been the story of a dream. And yet—had not the history of his whole life been as the story of a dream—if not more in reality than the histories of all other men, yet more, at all events, in seeming? Might he, to whom art and love had themselves been mere dreams and nothing more, flatter his soul that what was as yet but a mere dream by its very nature should turn out to be a reality? He was never a good hand at waiting, and at last his impatience fairly got the better of him. It was a mere chance that he did not set out either for Denethorp or for the Jura—at all events, that he did not cut the Gordian tangle in which all things seemed to have knotted themselves, by the flight, not of a coward from the field, but of a weary man from the world.

But as in all black humors, so in his—"fling but a stone, the giant dies." And, in truth, the sudden hammering upon his door, that roused him from the dreams that had begun in rose-color to end in sable when the sun had set, was literally like nothing less than a shower of many stones. It was the signal of the arrival of Dick Barton, and of Dick Barton alone. An ordinary being is content, when he visits the lodgings of a friend, with a formal tap; but the Bohemian of Bohemians always advanced to a visit as if he were attacking the gate of a fortress with a battering-ram.

And Dick Barton it proved to be, though such a Dick Barton as would have astonished considerably his fellow-orators of Shoe Lane. His face, which generally seemed to be neither with nor without a beard, was cleanly shaven; and the soap that such an operation renders a matter of necessity for the chin seemed to have extended to the very roots of his hair, which also shared in this remarkable piece of Philistinism. That it had actually been brushed and combed would be perhaps too much to say: but it had plainly, though but in fancy, beheld the vision of a brush, and evolved, though but from its inner consciousness, the idea of a comb, like the German philosopher who, without ever having seen one, trusted to his inner soul to evolve the idea of a camel. His clothes also, which generally looked as if they had been put on thirty years ago, and left to take their chance ever since, were now sufficiently arranged to give their wearer the air of the patron of a country dealer in second-hand garments: his coat seemed to be a marvellous specimen of misfit, not from carelessness, but from being worn by a man to whom a coat was a coat,

and nothing more. And besides all this, while one of his hands was dingy, to say the least of it, up to the very finger-nails inclusive, the other, by its comparative redness, seemed to show that the griminess of its fellow was not, as there had hitherto been good reason to suppose, its natural hue. It was the phenomenon of the hyacinth over again. In fact, the transformation was so remarkable—for any inconsistent change, in the case of a man who is always in appearance the same, amounts to a transformation in the eyes of those who know him well—that some had been reminded of the fable of the lion in love, others of that of the spaniel and the ass. Some marvelous influence must have been at work to induce Dick Barton to pare his nails, and so far to imitate the arbitrary ways of fashion as to insert the proper button of his waistcoat in its proper hole. One rash member of the staff of the "Trumpet," who was celebrated for the happy style of his badinage, asked him that very morning if the Mrs. B. that was to be a brunette, that he, in obedience to the law of contrast, thought it his duty to become blond: but he only answered by a growl that proclaimed him to be the lion still, and by an anathema upon womankind at large that, it is to be hoped, proved him, in his judgment of them, to be the less noble quadruped, after all.

Felix himself could not but be aware of some sort of change, though he judged rather from general effect than from details. In fact, to see in Barton even the most remote tendency to the externals of respectability, was sufficient to impress the least observant eyes.

"Well," said his visitor, with an unwonted air of having something to say, and yet of not being able to say it, "what's the last news with you? At all events, you're alive—that's something. Do you know why I came here? I wanted to try my hand at the penny-a-line business, and thought I might have come in for a coroner's inquest—and I don't even see an empty-poison bottle. And if you have been indulging in charcoal, why all I can say is, that charcoal smells monstrously like tobacco. And so— Well, this is a world of disappointment, and it serves us right, into the bargain. What is your philosophy?"

Felix knew his old comrade too well not to know that the latter had been right when he said in effect that he expressed by laughter very much what other men would more consistently express by tears. And on this occasion the laughter was far too forced not to contradict itself—not to be as sorry as the jest that was supposed to give it rise.

"My dear Barton," said Felix, holding out his hand, "my philosophy is simply this—that, so far as my own experience goes, candles are a great deal more valuable than the stakes for which we play by the light of them. But I am also sure that, having once shared in the deal, we ought fairly to play our hand out, whether we hold good cards or no."

"The devil it is! I for one don't see any ought in the matter. On the contrary, it seems to me that we have to sit down and play the game out, whether we will or no—whether the devil stands at our elbow to turn our common cards into trumps, like some people we know, or whether we are left to the help of our own unaided stupidity, like you and me. But what the

deuce is the matter with you? You have grown as oracular as the Cumaean Sibyl, and as epigrammatic as myself."

"Do you remember—"

"Remember? Only too well. If I could get rid of this confounded memory of mine— By-the-way, what do you think of women?"

"Of women?"

"Yes—of women. For my part, I think them enough to provoke a saint, let alone a devil. By all the gods and goddesses to boot, I *did* hope that Cram Warden would somehow get what he deserved, though I wouldn't be friendly enough to you to help the rascal send you to another and a better world. I call it better, simply because it isn't this world of ours: it couldn't be worse. Why, in the name of that quarter of the better world that men call hell, didn't you let me deal the cards in my own way? Any way, I would so far have dealt him what he deserved, that he, at least, should not escape whipping—to give a mild name to the soundest thrashing that was ever enjoyed by man."

"Barton," asked Felix, "can you be serious for a moment? You are my friend, I know: and now you are more my friend than ever."

"I should think so: if it had not been for me, there would have been a coroner's inquest, after all. But can I be serious, you ask me? I haven't much cause to be any thing else, I should fancy. "*Virtus laudatur et alget*"—half the Greek in England is to be found in Saragossa Row. I offered to pay for my dinner only yesterday with a Greek epigram, as good as any in the whole Anthology; and—would you believe it? the—cur of a waiter, instead of handing me a hundred-pound note in change, demanded an additional fifteen-pence."

"Yes," continued Felix, not heeding his talk, which, more random than ever, as though, like the cuttle-fish concealing itself from its foes, he was striving to hide in a thick cloud of meaningless words some new feeling of which he was more than half ashamed. "You know in what way I mean. The brother of Marie is mine also. And now—"

"Bah! Because I advised a woman not to bathe in the Thames till the weather was warmer?"

"Is she with you still?"

"Yes—one can scarcely turn even so much as a woman out into Saragossa Row. Oh, you need not be jealous—" and he turned his face away suddenly with a sigh.

Felix looked up quickly. Could Barton also be a dreamer of dreams—could he, this incarnation of iambs and brandy—but the thought was too absurd.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he continued: "fancy Mrs. Cram Warden turning out to be Miss Esther Barton! I am certainly well off for a brother-in-law—almost as well as he."

Felix looked at him again. Was the thought so absurd, after all?

"I do not know what my fate may be," he went on; "I only know that it must be forever apart from hers. I am denied the right of even obeying her. But come what may, she must not be left at least without some one to defend her rights—some one to shield her, so far as may be, from harm. When I left her yesterday—you know how—it was with an intention of burying

myself from the world, but not so deeply but that I might still watch over her whom— But now, even that is denied me. This may be the last time that you and I may ever meet. Let me, whatever happens, feel secure that you will be to her what I meant to be: I have no right to ask you, I know—but—”

“What—I? I who am not fit to take care of this carcass called Dick Barton—whom no man would trust to the extent of three penny-worth of gin? You trust Maria—Esther—to me?”

“Yes—to you.”

“Then I say, yes, by God!”

He rose up at once from his chair, and tossed back his rough hair like a newly-wakened lion tossing back his mane. Felix could almost see a new strength bracing the limbs that nature had rendered so strong, as if in mockery to show how useless and ill-bestowed her gifts may be.

But before he had time to reply, the door opened, and Hugh Lester entered hastily.

“I thought you would never come,” said Felix. “Is it settled? When is it to be?”

“It is all settled,” Hugh answered, without observing the presence of Barton. “On Friday fortnight I meet Mark Warden on Calais sands.”

“You?”

“Yes—I.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

It may be thought that the position of Mark Warden had at last, after a prosperous course, become more than a little embarrassing—that, to speak more strongly, nothing was left to him but to throw up his cards, and to retire from the table as gracefully as a man who sees that luck is against him may. Good cards had certainly been dealt him at the opening deal, and he had as certainly played them well—perhaps, indeed, he had done even a little more than merely content himself with playing them well. But no one can foresee all things. His programme had been plain enough up to a certain point, and all things had hitherto proceeded strictly in accordance with it. He had become on the best possible terms with Miss Raymond—he was rid of Marie without having been forced to resort to extreme means in order to be rid of her—he stood high in the good graces of Miss Clare—he was practically secure of his seat in Parliament, and Hugh had fallen altogether out of the field. But then had come in this unexpected complication in the person of Felix—a complication for which, even had he been a second Argus, he could not, any more than any one else, have been prepared. Even he, it will be thought, must begin to suspect that the proverbs with which he had on a former occasion sought to comfort his soul, and which set the will of man—at least of such men as are capable of forming a purpose, and of keeping to it when formed—above the might of all possible circumstances, were little better than mere epigrams after all, and as false as epigrams, always necessarily one-sided, must always be. But such a thought on the part of those who have taken the trouble to follow his career would wrong him terribly. That nature of his that made it always impossible for him to surrender a purpose once formed was not likely to change now; and a brain that can only keep cool needs no extraordinary

fertility in resource in order to find the means of attaining any possible end. The change of immediate adversaries caused Warden surprise, but simply no embarrassment. Even the surprise did not last long: he had long ago had good cause for writing down Hugh as the very prince of asses, on whose part any new piece of folly could not be so extreme as to afford any matter for wonder on the part of a sane man.

“One story,” says another proverb, “is always good till another is told.” No doubt even Shylock would have a great deal to say for himself could he be heard by his counsel at the bar of posterity, instead of being condemned off-hand on the *ex parte* statement of the counsel for Antonio. It is very possible that the latter was a great rascal, if the truth were known, and that Shylock was actuated by the best motives in the world. And so, to come down from illustrious to obscure examples, it is much to be feared that in the matter of this history also the judgment of the reader has been delivered prematurely. There is no story in the world that can not be told in at least two ways: and he has, so far, heard that of Earl’s Dene told only in one. Now, therefore, in justice to all concerned in it, let him hear it told as, without a single change of incident, without a single modification of theory, it might have been told.

Miss Clare of Earl’s Dene, then, a proud and obstinate old lady—but, like most proud and obstinate people, very easily deceived—had adopted her nephew, Hugh Lester by name, to be her heir in fact and her son in affection, and had devoted her life to his welfare and happiness. She had brought him up with all the care and love of a mother: she had sent him into Parliament, and had found for him the very best of wives. But this young man, with a strange and fatal perversity, had shown himself in every respect unworthy of his good fortune and of her devotion. That he was destitute of brains was not his own fault: but he might at least have shown himself possessed of the most common gratitude. In the midst of an important election in which all things depended for their result upon his conduct and energy, he wasted his time and neglected his duty in a clandestine and unworthy love-affair with a girl who afterwards made an ignominious failure on the stage; and, when it was accidentally discovered, he was fool enough and ungrateful enough, though at the risk—as he well knew—of breaking the heart of his benefactress, and with the certainty of disappointing all her hopes, to take this girl with him to London, to secretly marry her, and, with her aid, to enter upon a career that was very like one of swindling, to say the least of it, not only in order to live, but to provide for his own and his wife’s extravagance. Miss Clare, in spite of her affection for him, could not but cast him off: he was obliged to withdraw from his club, and was cut by all his former acquaintance. At last, in spite of the skill of his wife and of himself in the noble art of living upon fictitious credit, and upon money borrowed without the remotest prospect of ever repaying it, he fell into a state of complete destitution, and found himself the guest of an officer of the Sheriff of Middlesex. Driven to his last resources, he formed a design as ingenious as it was bold, and as bold as it was execrable.

Miss Clare, as it has been said, was of a cred-

ulous nature, and her life had not been quite so immaculate as was supposed. In her earlier life she had had a son whose loss in infancy was a matter of history. But his death, though it was notorious, had never been actually proved. So Hugh Lester got hold of a foreign adventurer from Paris, an old lover of his wife, also at his wits' end for a living, whom he induced to combine with him to carry out an atrocious fraud—nothing less than that this fellow, Felix Créville by name, whose surname by a happy coincidence had some resemblance to that of the father of the child, should personate that child, and so secure for himself, nominally for himself and for Hugh in reality, what the latter had justly forfeited, and what should by rights have passed to others. The scheme succeeded to admiration. Miss Clare was not only credulous, but was even willing to be deceived; and so she made a will, leaving the whole of her estate to her supposed son. There was, however, one obstacle in the way of the conspirators in the person of a friend of the family who was too clear-sighted to be taken in by this impudent though plausible imposture. His name was Mark Warden; and he had already proved his disinterested friendship for Miss Clare and for her nephew also in a hundred ways. It was he who by his own indefatigable exertions, and without reward, had saved the election which Lester had tried his best to throw away: it was he who in a spirit of noble unselfishness had done all he could to prevent the ruinous and degrading *mésalliance* that rendered all his exertions in the election vain. But he who had shown himself capable of putting so abominable a fraud upon his mother was not likely to have many scruples about ridding himself of his friend. It was necessary somehow to put the latter out of the way, though at the risk of his own life. He was no coward; on the contrary, he had already shown himself a willing duellist in addition to his other merits: so, with the aid of his accomplice, he forced a duel upon Warden, and—

Well, the result was yet to be known; but whatever that result might be, this was the story that, if Warden should survive the meeting, must needs go forth to the world, and, by a very little judicious management, become accepted by Miss Clare also. If, on the other hand, matters should take a contrary turn, his own conduct and character would still remain stainless—supposing that to be worth consideration in the case of a dead man. For Warden, who had been willing to risk all things upon the chance of a bullet, as between himself and Felix, was far more willing to risk all things upon the chances of the same game now that his opponent was far more important, and that victory would be victory indeed.

Not that he by any means intended to leave the event of the game entirely to be decided by Fortune. That had never been his way, nor was it now. Hitherto he had invariably treated her as his loyal servant, and he was not likely to accept her as his mistress in the very crisis of his success. Other things may be managed besides dice, and made friendly to the interest of the thrower; and a pistol may be loaded in more senses than one. Not that he was going to do any thing unfair—was he not a man of honor and a gentleman? And besides, had he been neither, such a thing was out of the question. But he knew himself, and he knew his opponent:

and, as whist-players well know, a great deal may be done, when this is the case, without a single false shuffle of the cards. He, as a wise man, and therefore able to accept facts and look them well in the face, could not but see that the meeting between himself and Hugh would have to be final in the most extreme sense—that no more than one of the two must be permitted to leave the ground. And, as being something more than a wise man, he quite made up his mind that the one who was to be left upon the ground should not be he.

Of course he still ran some risk—that was inevitable; but he ran no more than he had already made up his mind to run. Even a blockhead may shoot as straight as a wise man; and, shot for shot, the blockhead was perhaps the more likely to shoot straight of the two. But Warden had his own views on this matter, and saw no reason to be afraid of his star. For the present it was necessary to make himself master of the situation in all its details—of the nature of Felix's claim, as to how far it was capable of proof, and of the extent—about which, however, he felt tolerably secure—to which he could count upon the heart of Miss Raymond.

First, of course, he relieved the mind of Major Andrews by telling him of the new course that things had taken—that his opponent was one with whom a gentleman might, with a good social conscience, aid another gentleman to exchange shots. Indeed he now ventured to tell his own version of the story of Earl's Dene a little more fully, so that he might, in case occasion required, be provided with a favorable witness as to his own motives in the affair. The Major remained a little mystified still, and saw that there was more in the business than appeared; but there could be no doubt that the overt insults on either side were sufficient, without going below them, to afford an ample *casus belli*, and that it was high time for negotiations to cease, and for the pistol to be called in as arbiter. It is not necessary to enter into an analysis of the psychology of Major Andrews; it is sufficient to assume that Warden would not have chosen any man for his guide, philosopher, and friend who was not likely to guide, advise, and stand by him in whatever way he himself pleased.

After having finished this important piece of business by giving his friend *carte blanche* to keep within the letter of his instructions, to speak Hibernically, he considered what his next movement should be. He would have very much liked to be able to see Miss Clare, in order to learn at headquarters what was the true position of things, or at all events what view was there taken of them. But with this duel hanging over him he felt that it was politic to absent himself for the present. So he contented himself with calling to inquire after her, and was not displeased to find that immediate communication with her was impossible, as she had just left town. He was a little put out by not having been officially informed of her departure, but this was too easily accountable for him to be rendered seriously anxious by it. Indeed he was in fact only too glad that she was out of the way: his constant presence at her house would now have been embarrassing to him, and he could not have broken it off without remark. So, as it was still early, he amused himself for an hour or so at a shooting-gallery in the

neighborhood—he had not the art of killing time by lounging—and then, having satisfied himself that his eye and hand were in full accord, went to call upon Miss Raymond.

She was in, but she was not in—that is to say, she was reported as being not at home; but, when Warden asked leave to write a note to her, and gave his card, she, while he was writing, came into the room into which he had been shown.

CHAPTER XIX.

"So Miss Clare has left town, I find!" he asked, as he folded up his half-written note and put it into his pocket. "Is it not rather sudden? I hope she was well enough to undertake the journey?"

"Yes; she left on Friday—yesterday. Home is the best place for her now."

"She has had some great excitement, I am afraid, that was too much for her? I hope—"

"I hope, too, that all will be well again, now that she has forgiven Hugh."

"Then as to the cause of her illness—as to what else has happened—she has told you nothing?"

"Nothing. After Hugh left her she scarcely spoke a word."

"Not even to you? Well I too hope that all is well again between her and Hugh, with all my heart. But do you know that this very reconciliation has rather alarmed me?"

"Alarmed you?"

"Yes. You know Miss Clare: that she is justice and goodness itself; but that, like many people who are justice itself, she is not very apt to forgive?"

"I do not understand you. I should think that being ready to forgive was a part of justice. And what can we be more glad of than that she should be friends again with Hugh?"

"Nothing, of course. But you know what these sudden reconciliations are apt to mean with people like her. She was certainly very ill before she sent for Hugh; and there was no more reason for her forgiving him then than at any other time."

Miss Raymond looked alarmed. "You think there is real danger, then—that her illness is so serious?"

"That is what I meant. But her being able to take this long journey is certainly reassuring. Only—do you know of any other reason for her sending for him besides her being ill?"

"None."

"You are in her confidence: you would probably know if there were."

"I am aware of nothing more. Indeed she has told me nothing."

Warden drew a breath of relief. This ignorance on her part made his course far more easy than he had even hoped to find it.

"My dear Miss Raymond," he said, "you have relieved my mind more than I can say. I was afraid of all sorts of mysteries; and, as you are no longer seriously anxious about Miss Clare—you who know her best—neither am I."

"She was so much better after seeing Hugh that I really think there is no cause for fear."

"This has been an anxious time for us all, however."

"Yes; and you have been such a true friend—you, with so much to think about besides."

"What could I think of but Miss Clare and you? I am glad you do me justice. Do you know, I was inclined to doubt it lately?"

"Why?"

"I thought—well, it does not matter. Hugh is an older friend than I am, after all."

"Poor fellow! Yes: but are you not now an old friend too?"

"I wish he would think so."

"And does he not?"

"You see, men are not apt to think too justly of those who rise, however unwillingly, upon their fall. And I thought somehow, when I last met you—when he came to you—that—it is so difficult to say—that, to speak plainly, I was treated as though, having shared your anxieties, I should be ill-pleased to share your happiness. There, I have made my confession, and am glad to find that it was not needed."

Miss Raymond blushed, for the complaint was not altogether without foundation. Somehow, though her reason and her inclination were on Warden's side, some instinct within her had certainly proved his enemy on the occasion to which he referred.

She held out her hand. "I am afraid we were thinking too much of ourselves," she said. "I know—Miss Clare must know—that there is no one so much entitled to share in her happiness as you."

"Thanks indeed!" he said, taking her hand and retaining it for an instant. "You are right in that. So they are really reconciled?"

"I hope so—indeed I am sure of it."

"In spite of that unhappy marriage?"

"If it is unhappy. Why should it be? Because Angelique was poor—because she was of lower rank than he? Must an unequal marriage always be an unhappy one?"

"God forbid! I called it unhappy because it had been the means of parting a mother and a son. But you really think, then, that a marriage to be happy need not be equal?"

"Ah, I suppose you think me very unfashionable in my opinions?"

"It is always unfashionable to be right, I am afraid. For myself, I think—" he paused.

"Well?"

"That unfashionable marriages—those made in the teeth of the world—are generally the happiest ones. Do you think me very romantic for a lawyer?"

"Well—perhaps I do, a little! I was afraid you were going to laugh at me."

"Ah, a lawyer is not so unromantic a being as you may imagine. And perhaps he is the more apt to believe in romance even than other men, because he sees into the hidden depths of men's lives: because he sees below the surface that society has laid over them. It is boys and the inexperienced who laugh at poetry: wise men know that it is poets, after all, who are the wisest of men."

Miss Raymond looked at him quickly. She felt that he was not altogether confining himself to an abstract question.

He saw her look, and said with studied abruptness,

"Miss Raymond—your words have given me a strange hope."

She could not but guess what was coming. Indeed, for that matter, she might have expected it long ago; and yet even now she had not made up her mind as to her answer. She could not trust her heart, which, though fond of freedom and not inclined to yield, was still far from being inclined to be cruel. And yet, though she felt embarrassed, she showed no outward sign that she even suspected what he was going to say. Girls like her have a marvellous power of self-control when they feel themselves to hold such a situation in their own hands, and to be able to surrender, to postpone the surrender, or not to surrender at all, just as they please. Angélique would have driven her lover at once to the point at which she intended him to arrive; Marie would have listened like a timid child; but Miss Raymond listened as all women but one in ten thousand would listen. She was excited, but outwardly composed; and she was equally prepared either to accept or to refuse.

"I wonder whether you guess what I mean?" he went on. "I have long dreamed, without daring to hope—how indeed could I dare? I feel," he continued, after another moment, during which she was silent, neither aiding him nor preventing his saying what he had to say, "that I am in no way your equal in the way that the world talks of equality. Whatever I may be now, whatever in time I hope to be, you are still Miss Raymond of New Court—a great lady, who might be still greater if she chose. You are beautiful, you are good—it is not only to me that you are the first of all women in the world. No—I do not know how to flatter. And I—well, I am a gentleman, I hope, but still a poor fellow who has to make his way by his own hands and brains. I have done something, even now; and I trust to do a great deal more. But in the course of things it must be years before I can become what the world would call the equal of Miss Raymond. How indeed should I ever be? I have hundreds of faults—no one can fight the world with its own weapons and not bear some marks of the conflict. But I am ambitious also—is that a fault in your eyes? And my ambition is to live a life that shall not be unworthy even of you. May your words, then, really give me hope: may I at least feel that in my battle with the world I am fighting not for myself but for you—that every battle draws me nearer to—"

He spoke with a seriousness that did admirable duty for something more. She was still silent; but he felt that he had taken the right line so far. It was with an appearance of greater confidence that he continued—

"I am not speaking wildly. Thank God, you at least are not bound by the laws of the world! Yes—I love you with all my soul. That, at least, makes me your equal in the highest way of all. I do not ask you to say to me now all that I trust one day to hear you say. But I do ask you to tell me to live."

In spite of her old instinct, that refused to be allayed, she was strongly moved; for he had made love to her in the very way that was most calculated to move a girl with no nonsense about her. He had talked no nonsense: he had not raved: he had spoken like a man, earnestly and to the point. Moreover, he had claimed all due respect for himself, while he had yielded ample respect to her. He had also avoided the grand

mistake of protesting disinterested motives—a course which always has the ring of self-accusation. The superiority that he had conceded to her was no more than the superiority which a man may always concede to a woman without prejudice to his claim to be her master. And as she really believed in his superiority, she was really flattered by his concession; and she had lived too much and too invariably in an atmosphere of wealth to consciously regard it as a bar to her being loved for herself alone.

A woman is none the worse, however, for being on such occasions a little of a hypocrite. "Mr. Warden," she said, drawing herself just a little farther from him—for he had imperceptibly advanced towards her—"I—you can not tell how much you have taken me by surprise—"

"I hope not. Have you not seen—"

"That you cared for me, as a friend—"

"No more than that? No, I can not think that my secret, though it has been silent, can have kept itself so closely—"

"You ask me, then, to tell you—"

"That you will be my heaven, to strive for with all my soul."

This time the higher flight was not calculated to displease.

"But, indeed—"

"I can not think that I have spoken to you too suddenly. I am content to wait—but not without so much hope as you can give me now."

"And if—"

"If you give me that hope? I promise, by all my hope, to deserve it all. Only say that I am not quite nothing to you—that you are not displeased—"

"Displeased! It would be strange, indeed, if I were not proud. But—"

"But what?"

"It is so sudden!"

"I know that you must think me presumptuous—"

"Indeed I do not."

"You give me that hope, then? If you but knew how I love you!"

Her hesitation had really filled him with something like genuine warmth; but as his earnestness increased, so also did her hesitation. She was beginning to feel herself not quite so much mistress of the situation as she supposed. Indeed, if she had expected to play him and to land or not land him as she pleased, she found herself mistaken; and her reason and her generous instincts alike acted as his strong allies. Nothing would please her better than to bestow herself and New Court upon a strong man who would give as much as he received; and his being her social inferior was in harmony with her special form of romance. It must be remembered that all this occurred in days when English young ladies acquired that reputation for sentiment which in these they appear to be trying so hard to lose. And so, in so far as she found her garrison somewhat rebellious to her command, she was not so much a hypocrite, after all, when she pleaded that she had been taken by surprise.

"May I believe you?" she asked, in doubt—not of the answer, but of herself.

"I may hope, then?"

"This is all so strange!"

"Strange—that I love you?"

He began to feel that this trick also was won.

"Impossible. We walked down here last night. By Jove, it's cold!"

"He will doubtless be here immediately," said Hugh, who doubted no man's courage, and had no reason to doubt Warden's. "You came over last night, didn't you? Was there any news in town?"

"Oh, nothing particular. A pinch of snuff? Let me see, though—our friend is to have to fight for his seat, after all."

"Warden?"

"Yes. Of course he's full of it; or else I shouldn't know much about a place like Denethorp, of course."

"And who with?" asked Hugh, with interest. "Not Prescott again? I thought he'd retired."

"It is Prescott, though. He seems to be a deep fellow, Prescott. I know him a little, you know, in town. Between ourselves, I shouldn't wonder if he'd got an inkling of this affair, and so thought it might be as well not to be out of the field."

Hugh was silent. At last he asked,

"Are you sure of this?"

"As one of these pistols. Warden showed me a copy of his address—Radical, by Jove, to the backbone! Those sort of fellows ought to be hung, every man of 'em. By George, Lester, you may bring in the Radical, after all! And you a good Tory, too!"

Hugh's face fell. Major Andrews had intended to make a joke; but many a true word is spoken in jest.

It was not for more than a minute that he spoke. "Have you the address with you?" he asked, very gravely.

"No—but Warden has."

"And does he pledge himself to go to the poll?"

"Not exactly. But he says that circumstances may very likely induce him to—and I think you and I can pretty well guess what he means. He knows you can hit pretty straight if you please."

"Felix," said Hugh, "come here. No one," he went on, "will think the worse of me, I know, if I propose that this meeting of ours should be postponed till after the contest. I know something of Denethorp politics; and if any thing should happen to-day, Prescott would walk over, and would keep the seat forever."

"Hm!" said the Major. "For my part, I should like the affair to be put off for good and all. We shall have to risk losing a seat to the Radicals."

"Couldn't we make some arrangement of the kind?"

"Or suppose you arrange to fire in the air, and have it over comfortably?"

"I fear not. It is too serious a business, and has gone too far. But Warden must go to the poll and win—that is certain."

Major Andrews looked at his watch rather uneasily.

"But what can he be doing?" he asked.

"This is one of the few occasions when a man is bound to be punctual. I will walk towards the inn, if you will excuse me, and then we will continue our conversation."

But just then Warden's figure was seen in the distance hurrying along the sands, and in a few minutes he joined them.

He bowed both to Hugh and Felix. He was

very pale, and it was obvious that he was in a high state of nervousness.

"How can I apologize for having kept you waiting?" he said. "I overslept myself—and that is no excuse, I know."

The Major took him aside.

"You have walked too fast," he said: "you had better be quiet for five minutes. Lester has proposed to me—certainly in a most honorable manner—that we should put off this affair till the election is over. For my own part, at the last moment, I should suggest that it be put off altogether. But what do you think of his proposal?"

Warden considered for a moment.

"You surprise me a little," he answered. "It can not be put off altogether, as you know, without my owning myself in the wrong, which I can not do, of course. And as for postponing it, that is equally impossible, as it seems to me. We are all here and ready, and we may as well have it over."

"But Mr. Lester has made his offer entirely on your account."

"I am much obliged to him. But I could not think of putting you, on my account, to such inconvenience."

"I think you are wrong, Warden. You are in my hands, you know, and it is for me and for Mr. Crévillé to decide."

"Scarcely, I think. You have probably seen enough to have gathered that the real cause of our quarrel is and must remain entirely private. That being so, the mode in which this meeting is arranged must also to some extent be less a matter for friends than usual. Our quarrel must be decided in this way sooner or later; and the sooner the better."

"It seems to me that you make my position rather a nominal one."

"Not at all. Besides, Mr. Crévillé is in precisely the same position."

"Then let us hear what Mr. Crévillé has to say."

"You may talk to him if you please."

"And you will put yourself in our hands?"

"I shall certainly refuse to leave this place until the affair is arranged—and that, as I have told you, can only be in one way."

"You are scarcely acting according to rule."

"On the contrary, I am quite in rule."

"I think not."

"But I do. And so—"

"I can not act for you with my hands tied."

"I do not ask you to do that. The affair is out of your hands so far as negotiation is concerned. I consider it almost an additional insult on the part of Mr. Lester to ask for a postponement now. I can not consent to have been forced to fight, to have been actually brought at the extreme personal inconvenience to the ground, and then to be sent back again with it hanging over my head still. A man who is as prompt to quarrel as Mr. Lester should be equally prompt to bring his quarrel to the end. You remember the advice of Polonius, no doubt. And this proposal is not out of consideration to myself, I assure you. You know that he and Prescott are old personal enemies, as well as political opponents; and it would be gall and wormwood to him to see Prescott returned for Denethorp."

"If that is so—why, then, certainly—"

"Why, what else can it be? He has quarrel-

led with Prescott, he has quarrelled with his aunt, and he has quarrelled with me. His conduct during the last election makes it simply ridiculous for him to profess to act on public grounds; and of what personal interest can the Denethorp election be to him now, except so far as he can prevent the return of one enemy now and of another hereafter? He won his own election by pistols instead of votes, as you know; and I presume he does not wish to have been under fire in vain. His sparing me to-day will prevent Prescott's return now, and you may be very sure that so professed a duellist will not spare me when my seat is won; and he knows that a third contest Prescott will hardly care to stand."

"Certainly your view alters the case. Mossiou Créville, I fear the affair must go on."

"Assuredly, Monsieur le Major. We are quite

"I have something to say," said Hrhg. "If Warden chooses to risk losing this election, I do not. I insist upon a postponement; and I will do nothing on this occasion to let him run the risk. It will be quite useless to go on, for I shall fire in the air."

"That is absurd," said Warden, angrily. "This must go on, and go on now. Major Andrews agrees with me; and, if I am not mistaken, Mr. Créville also. You may fire into the sea, if you like, but you must do so at your own peril. I bind myself to nothing. You know that what is between us must not end in a farce."

"Exactly so," Hugh answered. "And so why go on with what must end in a farce now?"

"It seems to me," said Major Andrews, "that when friends are disregarded and kept in the dark, the best thing they can do is to retire."

"And it seems to me," said Warden, "that Mr. Lester has become exceedingly anxious that the affair should end in a farce not only now but altogether."

It was nothing less than an accusation of cowardice, which Hugh's position, as the champion of the family honor, rendered it impossible for him to pass by without putting himself in the wrong for good and all. The Major also, who began to find his own situation rather a false one, felt angry. His definition of gentlemanly conduct was perhaps rather conventional; but it distinctly excluded the passage of insults upon the ground.

"Gentlemen," he said, not displeased with an excuse for washing his hands of the business, "I will wish you good-morning. I did not come to be present at a duel of words; when I want that, I can go to Billingsgate." And he turned to go.

"Stop," said Hugh. "After what Warden has just said there is nothing more to say."

"I think not either," said the Major; "and so I will say nothing more—good-morning. I think my friend has managed to put himself in the wrong—and if I am ever asked about it I shall say so."

"I am much obliged to you," said Hugh: "but I must not give you the trouble. Oblige me by remaining and acting for Mr. Warden

still. If any thing in the way of us may be in need of some authority."

"To oblige you, the Mossiou Créville, let us proceed to business. You will stand at twenty paces; and I will give it, and then you will fire."

The ground was measured, the opponents took their places. Hugh was perfectly calm, and he quite made up his mind as to what he ought and what he therefore intended to do. Warden was equally determined, in a way; but, though outwardly calm and steady, was far from being really self-possessed. For, though determined in the sense of having made up his mind not to lose his opportunity, he was any thing but certain as to how his opportunity was to be used.

About one second had now to elapse before the signal was given.

Such seconds often seem an eternity; but to Hugh it did not seem long. He was still, disinterested as he was, the avowed and conscious champion of the right and of the honor of Earl's Dene: he was in the position of some exiled prince, who still regards himself, though no others so regard him, as representing the rights and the honor of the country which has deposed him. He was bound in honor to receive his opponent's fire; but he was equally bound in duty not to let his opponent receive his own. An accident to Warden would more than probably destroy forever the political prestige of Earl's Dene that it was his duty to support as much as its honor. Because he had lost his rights, he was not in revenge to throw off his duties. He would have preferred to fight under circumstances that left him free to aim as straight as he pleased; but that could not be helped now.

Warden knew what was in Hugh's mind as plainly as if he read it in an open book. But the second seemed to him immeasurably long. He scarcely knew what to do. The temptation to take advantage of so marvellous an opportunity was almost too great to resist, for his opponent was practically standing unarmed before him; and yet, for once, he would not unwillingly have owed a little to fortune. At last his familiar devil, his one idea for which he had so long plotted and ventured, threw itself into the scale. He fixed his eyes upon those of Hugh, and felt a sort of fascination that was almost a presentiment of what was to come. Indeed he was scarcely his own master, even as it was less Faust who held the sword than Mephistopheles who guided it that slew Valentine. It is not during such instants that impulse has time to become self-conscious: and who shall say that under such circumstances any man is quite responsible for what he may or may not do?

"One—two—three!" counted the major deliberately; and the white handkerchief fell upon the sand. Hugh threw up his hand above his head; and two shots, with scarcely the smallest interval between them, rang with a muffled sound through the mist.

BOOK IV.—THE RETURN OF THE WIND.

CHAPTER I.

In one respect it is impossible for youth, even by means of the most sympathetic imagination, to be in complete sympathy, or rather in complete harmony, with nature. To know nature fully, as a wife and not as a mistress, it is necessary to have lived long enough to become a little callous about time: to have come to feel the recurrence of the seasons only as a different form of the sequence of the hours, and years to be nothing more than days. To the young, and to those who live among men, a quarter of a century is not only, metaphorically speaking, a lifetime; but to the old, as to all the sanctuaries of nature in which her spirit takes refuge from the insatiable attempts of mankind to drive her from the world, it seems, and really is, but an hour.

And a nation, which, after all, is not an abstraction, is in this respect, as in all others, subject to the same law as the men and women of whom it is composed. In the first quarter of the present month—or, to speak after the manner of men, of the present century—the nation called France had lived through what seemed ages of youth: men had come and gone, in a ceaseless whirl that prolonged a condition of things in which every day had destroyed something old and brought about something new, so far as there may be any new thing under the sun. He who had lived through this period beyond the sea would on his return have found all things changed. But there were some things that were not changed, simply because they were unchangeable. To the hills, to whom a thousand years is but a day, twenty-five years had not been an hour—not a minute. Summers and winters, storms and sunshine, are not revolutions: they are nothing more to these than are its waves to the sea—the varying conditions of what in itself knows no change.

So might have thought a traveller in the recesses of the Jura who had not revisited them till the year 182—, after an absence of five-and-twenty or thirty years. But so did not think the postilion of a carriage drawn by two horses that was passing along the high-road from Besançon to Lons-le-Saulnier in the month of January in that year—yes, in the month of January, for the gods of nature, like Nature herself, live forever, and the barbarous name of Nivose was known no more. He did not think so, simply because he was beginning to grow old, and to sympathize with the hills in sight of which he had lived all his days.

The carriage in question was a great post-chaise that had been taken at the Hotel de la Sirène at Besançon. It was sound, if not easy upon its springs, and thoroughly safe, if proportionally heavy. The meagre horses were well up to their work—that is to say, they galloped through villages at full speed, went at a foot-pace *along the level roads*, and crept at that of a

funeral up the hills; and the no less meagre postilion was well up to his—that is to say, he cracked his whip bravely when there was any one to admire his performance, and paid more attention to the safety of his equipage than to the speed of his employer, when, as was most often the case, there was no one to admire him but the crows. For the rest, the day was cold enough, but, as there was no wind, not unbearably so, and the ground was covered with untrodden snow, though none was falling, and though what which had already fallen was not sufficient to block the road. On the contrary, the sun was shining full upon the dazzling white domes that lay to the left, and more especially upon one that rose in the distance like that of a cathedral among those of lesser shrines. It was altogether, for winter-time, a rather exhilarating day for a traveller who was well provided with furs.

Such was the case with him or her—for the provision was so complete as to conceal both sex and age—who sat alone in the closed and heavily-piled carriage. The equipage proceeded quietly and slowly until it arrived at a place where a narrower road turned up-hill to the left between two lines of closely-cut trees, and where the main avenue crossed a narrow river that just here issued from a valley on its way to join the Doubs, the Saone, or the Ain. It was along the slope of the hills that formed one side of this valley or mountain-pass that the branch-road lay, so that it followed the upward course of the stream, over which it hung, higher and higher in proportion as it led farther and farther among the hills. At the fork of the two roads stood a direction-post with three arms, on one of which, among other information as to distances, and as to its standing in the department of Doubs, was written "To Besançon," on another "To Lons," and on the third, which pointed along the branch-road, "To St.-Félix-des-Rochers."

It was along the latter that the two horses turned, or rather were turned, for it was not by any means of their own accord. Whether they had any special objection to St.-Félix-des-Rochers or no, they were certainly not unjustified in objecting to the road that led thither. The leafless trees were not planted along it for any great distance, which was so far of consequence that, where their lines ended in a few straggling sentinels, the up-hill work fairly began, while the road itself was by no means in so perfect a state of repair as that which they left behind. On the contrary, it would not be going too far to say that it was a very bad road indeed, by no means rendered more easy to travel by the snow that hid its defects, and by a sensation of risk caused by the height to which it gradually rose above the bed of the stream. The prospect became confusing, also, with its monotony of glittering white, while the high dome that had formed a sort of landmark fell gradually to the rear.

An unbroken waste of trackless snow doubtless has a grandeur of its own, but it is of a wearisome kind. It is no wonder that the figure within the coach only wrapped itself up more closely in its sables—perhaps in its own thoughts also, from which it was not likely to be distracted by any passer-by.

But unlikely things happen sometimes. A V-shaped, springless cart of the country, drawn by two mules, was, after a mile or two had been passed, seen descending the road; and when the two vehicles had met, they stopped with one accord.

The bloused driver of the cart stared hard at the postilion. The latter answered with an expressive shrug, that seemed to say, "It is not I that am gone mad," and with the words—

"To St. Félix."

"*Sacré!* I thought you had mistaken your road," said the latter, resting his elbows on his knees, and staring this time at the carriage.

"As if I didn't know this thing from a high-road!" said the postilion.

"And what have you got there?"

"A lady," answered the postilion, with a backward jerk of his elbow.

"*Sacré!* But that is an affair!"

"Without doubt. Madame is English."

"And what will she do at St. Félix?"

The postilion gave another shrug. But just then the window was let down, and a woman's voice said with a pure French accent, in spite of her imputed nationality,

"Are we not on the right road?"

"Madame is for St. Félix?" asked the blouse.

"For St. Félix-des-Rochers."

"Quite straight on, madame. You can not miss the way."

"Then what are you stopping for? Drive on at once," she said sharply to the postilion, and let down the window again.

Each of the talkers gave one final shrug, and the horses moved on once more.

But it was now no longer, in spite of the fineness of the weather, over-pleasant travelling for any one without a definite object. But, with this particular traveller, this was probably not the case. Those very few people who, like the reader, are acquainted with St. Félix, know also that to visit it without an object, at all events in winter-time, is a thing unknown. At present there was nothing to be seen but snow, and that can be seen without stirring from Paris; while to see the real splendor of winter one must go where lofty and well-marked mountain-ranges add splendor to its desolation. At last, just before sunset—for the carriage had set out before sunrise—a louder noise of water was heard at no great distance, and the window was again let down.

"Postilion! is not that the torrent of La Rochette?"

The postilion, who was falling into a doze, with which his style of driving by no means interfered, started and turned round.

"*Plait-il, madame?*"

"I asked, is not that the torrent of La Rochette?"

He stared in his turn. "Madame is not a stranger? She knows the torrent of La Rochette?"

"Can you not answer me?"

"That is the torrent," she said, "Stop here," she said, while the carriage moved forward from the window in front, and looked round. She did not seem to feel the cold, though it was now increasing.

She seemed to be remembering, or to be making an effort to remember.

"And what lights are those up yonder?"

"It is a *châlet*, madame. They call it Pré-aux-Fleurs."

"Pré-aux-Fleurs! Is that close to St. Félix?"

"Less than a league, madame."

"And how do we reach the town—the village?"

"Straight along the road, madame."

"But across the torrent?"

"The road crosses the torrent, madame."

"But is not the road sometimes carried away?"

"Ah, madame, that used to be in old times. We have made all that right now. The last time was when I was almost a boy."

"And when was that?"

"When the Marquis was killed."

"The Marquis de Croisville?"

"Madame has heard of it, then? Yes—I saw the spot the next day. I come from St. Félix, madame must know, and I went with Jean-Baptiste. Perhaps madame has heard of Jean-Baptiste also?"

The lady looked still more interested. "I did not know you were from St. Félix," she said, in a gentler tone. "Well?"

"The road was carried clean away—it was fearful. Poor Pierre—he that was betrothed to Suzanne—had been with the Marquis. They knew all about it up there, at Pré-aux-Fleurs. He had been there just before, and had gone back to the Marquis; and in trying to get to the *châlet* they both fell into the river. It was a frightful fall."

"And how was that known?" she asked, after a pause.

"His dog, madame. It ran down and brought up a handkerchief belonging to the Marquis, which was shown when Madame la Marquise was examined at Besançon, before they sent her to be guillotined."

"And the child?"

"Ah—madame knows of the child?" he asked, opening his eyes in complete amazement. "That was safe—Pierre had carried it to Pré-aux-Fleurs, before he went back to the Marquis. Ah, he was a brave boy, was the little Félix! How Jean-Baptiste and he used to keep us all alive! Many a time have I danced to his violin. They were fine days—St. Félix isn't what it used to be now. I went away when I married a young girl *à bas*, and then the boy, I hear, went away too."

"And this Jean-Baptiste—who was he? Was it he who brought up the child?"

"No, madame—he was brought up at Pré-aux-Fleurs, by Father Laurent, and Aunt Cathon, and poor Suzanne. It was Jean-Baptiste taught him to play the fiddle."

And these people—you are from St. Félix—do you know them still?"

"Ah, madame, that was when I was young. But they all live still, except Aunt Cathon, who

died three years next We wait, and Suzanne is still at Pré-aux-Fleurs."

"And he was called Felix?"

"Felix, madame. Father Laurent baptized him. Will not madame proceed?"

"Wait a moment. So it is here that—that the Marquis—"

"If madame pleases, I will show her the very spot where the road was carried away."

A few yards brought them to where the torrent, which in summer was dry, but in winter was swollen by rain and melted snow, thundered under the road.

"There, madame," he said, pointing to a rude wooden cross such as the traveller so often sees by foreign roadsides to mark the spot of some violent death—"we put up that when the spring came."

The darkness was coming on, so that nothing could be seen clearly. "You say we are within a league of St. Félix," said the lady. "Take the carriage, then, across the bridge. I will descend for an instant."

"Plait-il, madame?"

"Do you not hear me?"

She spoke always as one who was used to obedience, and the man obeyed. She threw off some of her wrappings, and then stepped out into the snow, while the horses moved slowly on. There was no danger in approaching the cross, for a railing guarded the edge of the steep incline.

After more than five-and-twenty years—that is to say, after more than a lifetime—the Marquise de Croisville, for such she was, had found her way back to the spot where her punishment, as she believed, had begun, and where she now, tracing back the life of her child, felt already like a pilgrim who has reached the shrine. What a torrent of recollections, more blinding, more powerful than that of La Rochette, whose well-remembered thunder once more filled her ears, and unchained by any bridge, rushed through her then! She stooped down before the cross—she even knelt before it in the snow as she read with difficulty an inscription, of which were only decipherable the words—

"Priez pour les âmes du Marquis . . . et du Pierre Vouzy . . . 179 . . ."

An old impulse may be strong enough to have the same effect as habit upon a naturally impulsive nature that has been long unnaturally restrained. She had clasped the cross with both her arms; and now she stretched them out as she had done when she had, in that self-same spot, first found herself alone. It was as though once more the maternal instinct that had never been dead within her led her to seek her child even as she had sought for him in vain before.

"O God!" she exclaimed in English, and half aloud, "let my search end here—if I have sinned I have suffered! Let the end come now, as it may seem best in Thy sight."

How long she remained thus, buried in herself, can not be known. Her youth had returned: her self-restraint was gone, and she was wrapt, as it were, in that ecstasy that precedes miracles. The sun had set, but the moon had risen: and the reflection of the snow made a wild and magic light that was even clearer than that of day. But as yet she was unconscious of the change. Men have remained for hours without moving, without being conscious of any outer world, when in

this state of spiritual trance. But she was roused at last. Once again she mechanically stretched out her arm; and then she found that she had been recalled to herself by a light touch on the shoulder.

"Pardon, Madame," said a man's voice in French: "I feared—"

She turned round in the white moonlight. The son in one instant beheld his mother—the mother beheld her son.

This story has rambled along through many paths: it has dealt in what must often have seemed very random fashion with many people owing their connection one with another to the very extreme of accident. Without any hero or heroine for a centre, the reader must have been possessed of capacities for sympathy quite abnormal, if he or she has been able to bestow it in any large measure upon any of these puppets in the hands of what must have looked like the blindest chance. But that which we have chosen to call Circumstance, but which he, if he pleases, may now call by a higher name, is surely vast enough in its scope, and lofty enough in its interest, to render it impossible, for any one who is able in the least degree to look down for a while upon the labyrinth of life in which he, like those, has to move, to sympathize for the time with one man or woman more than with another, when all are equally as much puppets as these. For such,

"Best and worst,

Are we: there is no last or first:"

and while a spectator who should specially interest himself in some particular knight or pawn would gain, doubtless, some living personal interest—and that is worth having—he would neither take the proper interest in, nor would he understand, the game, which is, after all, the highest matter. And so, if the spectator of the game that we have called "Earl's Dene" will take the trouble to consider, he will find that even the most apparently random move of the most obscure piece on the board was absolutely necessary to bring about this strange meeting then and there. If in the course of it he has seemed to pass through much barren country—if he has often lost the clue, or found its threads perplexed and knotted—if, seeking with whom to sympathize, he has found the evil strong and the good weak—it is of the nature of the game called human life, and not of this small fragment of it, that he must complain.

The wind—which seems, at least, to blow as it listeth—which has blown about, in one direction or another, according to the nature with which they had been created or which they had acquired, all these living people who have crowded—perhaps it may be thought over-crowded—the air, like a flock of birds who have no conscious object save to devour the carrion or to escape the fowler, had at length sunk down where it had arisen. It "had gone toward the south and turned about unto the north: it had whirled about continually, and had returned again according to its circuits." All those years had been to the Marquise de Croisville but as one instant: it was as though that vain stretching out of the arms that she had made a lifetime ago had not proved barren: as though she had stretched them out not to lose, but to find.

How could she, of all people, not believe that

it was so her prayer had been answered? She was scarcely even surprised: her soul was wrought to its highest pitch, and, had she experienced a real miracle, it would not have seemed a miracle to her: had the dead Marquis risen from the dead, and stood in the white moonlight as phantom-like in reality as all else around her appeared, she would not have wondered. Once more, one feels no surprise, they say, in dreams.

And yet this was no dream, though Felix, to whom the nature of the emotions that filled her were unknown, almost thought so. It was more likely, or seemed more likely to one who had seen but his own dimly-lighted path through the maze of circumstances that had led him here, that a phantom mother should stand before him, than that she should stand before him in the flesh.

She had slowly risen, and now they stood face to face. Alone, in the moonlight, and upon the snow, both looked phantom-like indeed.

But they stood not thus for long. If she stood before him as the incarnation of dreams in which even Marie had no share, he stood before her as that of her memories in which no living mortal shared, but in which she herself recognized the hand of a destiny that was no less powerful than it was awful with mystery. Without another thought, without a question as to what had been or what might be, she, with a sob of "Victor!" threw herself, not upon his breast, but at his feet.

It was his father's name that she uttered: his own, while he had yet been her son; it was his name to her. He raised her, and supported her with his arm.

He, too, was less filled with emotion than with awe. "I meet, then, my mother at my father's grave," he said, scarcely knowing what he said, but speaking as men seem to speak in dreams.

There was no need for either to ask how the other had been brought there. One does not question when an event is its own sufficient answer.

Thus they remained for some instants without a word. At last the Marquise said,

"Speak to me, Victor! Have I indeed been dreaming all these years, or is it now that I dream?"

The words recalled Felix to himself. Would it had been a dream, like all the rest of his days! For he had that to tell which he would give all things to be able to leave untold. Still it must be told, and that now.

"It is no dream, my mother," he said at last. "I am indeed your son—and—may I be that to you and more also!—for you have no longer any son but me."

He spoke the last words so gravely, so sadly, that the Marquise started as if she had heard the first stroke of a funeral-bell. In the exaltation of the moment she had forgotten all that had lain between it and that which had immediately preceded it a lifetime ago. But now she remembered many things, while Felix bowed his head with a kind of shame.

"I come from one grave to another," he said only.

This was all that he said, while he raised his face and looked at that of his mother to see how he should proceed. But he learned nothing there: though as yet she could not guess what was in his mind and on his tongue, the look of stone that her face had so often worn of late, and

which had for a long time been the same, was returning to it once more in the face more hardening it into age. Could not ~~it~~ ^{she} happen to her, not even this meeting, which seemed given by heaven as a pledge of pardon, that was not fated to be bound up with despair?

But he had passed the barrier, and went on.

"Yes—he died, my brother, for you and for me. It was I who ought to have died! I was with him when he fell—and he shall be avenged. I have sought for you to tell you; for I knew what he had been to you, and what he had become to me. But you had left your home, none knew whither: and I—what was left for me but to return to my own? Would I had never left it!—I, who have brought nothing but harm to all I have ever known—even to him, even to you, our mother, whom I would have given my life to save from harm. Yes, he is dead for me—and I live to tell you this and to tell you here!"

She was still silent. She was no longer among phantoms now, but among terrible realities, even though the exaltation of soul through which she had passed had not yet died away. He went on, in a kind of apathetic desperation, feeling instinctively that it was best here and thus that all should be told.

He told her all he knew, all that he had heard, all that he had guessed since all was over. He told her, as rapidly as he might, and as tenderly, of his quarrel with Warden, of the solicitude of Hugh for her honor and for his above his own life, even above his own honor: of how Hugh, for his sake and for hers, had managed to take the place that should have been his, and of how he had fallen, nothing less than a martyr to the great cause of simple duty, whose true martyrs have been so few. As he spoke, his sight grew clear; and his clearness of vision gave clearness to his words. She understood also; and both, as he spoke, felt themselves to be standing together in the presence of a life and death which, in their blending together at last into one consistent whole, had, though fulfilled by one of the least among men, become heroic, nay, even sublime, and, in its mere simplicity, pathetic beyond the reach of words.

And yet Hugh himself would not have understood a word of all this; and in that lay the very deepest pathos of it all. In the presence of such a death was no place for ordinary sorrow, for common tears. In such an end there was something to have lived for, something that carried the man who had lived for it, in spite of all things, far above the world, and which made grief almost an insult, when even to wish to call him back to life would be to wish him ill.

With all the affection for him that lay at the very depth of her heart, his mother would have felt more pride than grief had he died in battle in front of the charge. Could she feel, then, nothing more than grief, now that he had died in defense of all for which she herself would have been proud to die, had she been he? She dared not, in that spot, before that cross, so wreathed with older memories for *immortelles*, and in the presence of her living child, admit any selfish feeling of despair—the time for that had gone by. She only bowed her heart before what she, according to her creed, could not but feel to be the hand of God Himself, and, less consciously, before that simple strength of human will which, when it consummates itself in death, renders even weakness

strong, unravels the maze, throws a mist of poetry over the wall of details of life, and makes mere common field nature sympathetic in spite of all things. Yes, circumstance may be conquered, after all; but it is only by those who are content and strong enough to die. The very mortal and very human nature of poor Hugh was superior to all things now, even to her affection; and she felt, though unconsciously, that it was not for her, dwarfed in the shadow of the spirit of death that ennobles all things, even to wish to render death less noble by rendering it less complete.

"His will be done," she said at last. "Even as I prayed, so it has come to me. And take no vengeance," she said, with a stronger voice. "He who has begun will know how to finish also; it is not for us to repay. And so—oh, Hugh, my son!" she exclaimed; and then, at last, she threw herself upon the breast of another, and wept bitterly.

Terrible are the winter tears of one who has never learned to weep. Felix was unable to utter a word. He stood there and supported her as she wept, not so much sharing in her grief as in the awe with which the still silence of the night was filled.

But her tears, once set free, flowed on. It was as though the tempests of years had been gathered up to burst forth at once. Still she could not pass the night in the snow; she must have immediate rest. And yet he could not leave her so, even for a moment, and they were still at some distance even from *Pré-aux-Flours*—still farther from *St. Félix*, whence he supposed she had come on foot to the spot where he had found her.

His own mingled feelings were giving way to fearful anxiety. If he could not calm her—if she were to sink down where she was—if the reaction were to come?—But suddenly he heard the neigh of a horse beyond the bridge. He called out, but received no answer.

But still the sound reassured him. So he made her sit down gently by the cross, in the very spot in which the Marquis had waited for the return of *Pierre*, and hurried over the bridge. A few yards farther on he saw the carriage and the two horses, which had waited there patiently for the best part of an hour. Indeed they would not improbably have waited there all night, for the postilion had fallen asleep. He was not disturbed by thoughts, and the night was cold.

Indeed, so soundly was he asleep that Felix had to shake him before he could be roused.

"All right, madame," he said, rubbing his eyes. "*Diable!*" and he started on seeing Felix by his side, and on becoming confusedly conscious that he had been dreaming. "What is it? Is madame in the carriage?"

"Turn the horses. Madame is waiting—and be quick."

They turned, and recrossed the bridge. Madame Clare—the Marquise de Croisville—what matters it how she is called now?—was kneeling by the wooden cross, which was embraced by her arms; and with her also all things were at an end, so far as the end of life may be the end of all.

CHAPTER II.

AND so Warden had triumphed. He had proved that man can triumph over circumstance, after all, and that he himself, at least, was capable of forming a plan, and of carrying it through fairly to the end.

When he saw what his own hand had done, it must not be supposed that, though the sight was not one that he could look on unmoved, he felt any useless scruples or impractical regrets. He was practical not by habit but by nature; and he was therefore incapable of entertaining any feeling that was out of place and that could lead to nothing. He had made up his mind that this duel must end fatally to one of the two, and he felt that he had no more real cause for self-accusation than the drowning man who has been compelled by the instinct of self-preservation to thrust a comrade in danger from a plank that is only large enough to support one. Of course, to have actually slain a man with one's own hand is very different from slaying him in thought only; but still facts are facts, and it is for weaker men than Warden to regret the inevitable. Wise men never indulge in regrets and retrospects, save in order to gather experience from them for the time to come.

Besides, if unpleasant thoughts did come—for, after all, he had raised a ghost that it was much more easy to raise than to lay—he had the art, far more common than people like to allow, of turning conscience into a useful advocate. Indeed that same conscience is often more than a useful advocate: it is a very corrupt judge, and sells itself readily for the most trivial price to the requirements of self-love. The complex character of human nature is certainly a terrible *crux*. Even Warden, clear-sighted as he was, was able to deceive himself as he was able to deceive others; and he had considered his own conduct so long from his own point of view that, now that he needed excuse for it even in his own eyes, he was able to persuade himself that he deserved the credit that he was about to claim.

So at last, after a short period of exile, he returned to England in the character of a well-intentioned and unfortunate man, to obtain the reward that was due to his good intentions, and the consolation that was due to his misfortune. Immediately after the duel he had written two long letters of explanation—one to Miss Clare, the other to Miss Raymond. To the former he received no answer; but to the latter he received one that was almost such as he would himself have dictated. Whatever Miss Raymond's secret instincts might be, she could not but feel both pity and admiration for the man who in the cause of justice had been obliged to kill one who had been his friend. It must be remembered that to have shed blood was not in those days a disgrace in itself, so long as the blood had been shed in honor; and a duellist, so far from being regarded as an assassin, might very easily come to find himself regarded as a hero. Besides, she, as a woman, was naturally ready enough to admire the doing of such deeds as, so it must seem to them, though falsely enough, only a very brave man can do; and not only so, but she felt bound, in her feminine idea of honor, to do all that she could for him who had risked his life in what she had made her own cause. He had gone out from

her as a knight-errant; and he had obtained that claim upon her which the knight of old had upon his lady when for her sake he had slain a giant or a dragon—that claim which, when she denied it, rendered her a by-word in the songs of the minstrels who sang of her lover's deeds. He had, as it were, won her with the strong hand—a way of wooing that is the only way to prevail with ladies who will say neither yes nor no. That feeling of distrust that had made itself felt, upon her first introduction to him in Market Street, and which still, in spite of her reason, had never quite died away, had now to yield to the feeling that it was no use for her to hesitate or to strive any longer: that matters were in fact settled for her, and that she had nothing to do but to submit to the logic of facts and yield. She deplored the course of events with all her soul; but it was with all that soul that lies beyond the reach of reason. Her reason could not but admit that that which she deplored was a great misfortune indeed, but one for which, at most, Warden was to be pitied and sympathized with, not blamed. Was it even altogether so much as a great misfortune? Was not Angélique freed from a husband who had sold her for the good things of the world, and was not Warden an instrument in the hands of Providence for bringing about the triumph of justice? She felt that to blame him would be almost a sin.

It will hence be gathered what had been the tone of the letter addressed to her by Warden, and of the answer which she had not delayed to send. It was, after all, unnecessary for Warden's success that he should gain her whole heart to its very depths, in the same way, for instance, as Felix had gained that of Marie, not by virtue of any thing that he had done, but by the right of one sympathetic nature over another: it was enough for him that she should regard herself as fairly won.

But of course, even so, things must not be hurried to their climax. The course was, however, sufficiently clear. Hugh and Angélique were certainly out of the running, and it would be easy enough for a man of resource to throw Felix out of it also. He had satisfied himself that to prove Felix an impostor would be the easiest thing in the world, even to the satisfaction of Miss Clare, and, as a necessary consequence, to get the will in Miss Raymond's favor revived. Meanwhile his receiving no reply from his patroness was not in itself an ill sign, more especially as she did not revoke her support of his candidature. It was not to be expected that, under the circumstances, she should be capable even of the physical labor of writing: and some shock to her body or to her mind would only render his future proceedings the easier, by rendering her more likely to be subject to the influence over her which he knew so well how to use. She might even hate him as the means of the death of Hugh; but he knew that he could reckon upon her sense of justice not to condemn him practically for an accident that he had been unable to avoid.

But to turn for a moment from personal to political matters. The glories of Denethorpelection-time seemed to have departed with the riotous proceedings that had marked the last. The close of the present contest was utterly tame; Madame Clare was absent from home, no one knew where, and the successful candidate was again absent from the hustings. It was Mr. White who

thanked the electors in the name of Warden for choosing the latter to represent his native town. Prescott did not even go to the poll.

The new member for Denethorpe waited patiently abroad until he heard that all gossip had ceased and the result of the election was known. Then he took the opportunity of writing again to Miss Clare, and of returning to England to lay his laurels at the feet of her who was to add to them the best of them all, and, what was more to the purpose, the richest also.

It was a cold winter's morning when he crossed from Boulogne to Dover—even he had sufficient sentiment to choose to pass through that town in preference to Calais. From Dover he wrote to Miss Raymond to announce his return, and to ask her when he might call upon her in London; and, after a day or two, he received the following reply:

"DEAR SIR,—I shall be prepared to see you on Wednesday next at any time in the afternoon."

"Yours truly, ALICE RAYMOND."

So curt and cold a note rather surprised him; but he naturally set it down as to be accounted for by some turn of girlish caprice which is always most active as the time approaches when it must forever be laid aside. And so the conqueror of circumstance spent the intervening time in going quietly about his ordinary affairs, which had got a little into arrear, and on the afternoon of the day named went to — Street to claim his reward.

Of course in the route to final triumph there were still risks and chances to encounter; but the great stages were past, and those that remained were difficult—so far as they were difficult at all—only as matters of detail. He would be no longer Mark Warden if he failed, now that he had nothing to do but to hold out his hand to gather the grapes—no longer sour, but as ripe and as sweet in imagination as in reality—that were trailing down in clusters as if asking him to pluck them and turn them into wine. He took prophetic stock of his future life as he walked along. Hugh's conduct and character would show in the blackest colors, more black even than that of the adventurer whom he had made his tool: he himself would appear the honest friend of all and the champion of the right: Miss Raymond would be once more the heiress of Earl's Dene, and he, in due time, would become the husband of Miss Raymond. At last Miss Clare would, in the course of nature, die; and the grandson of the Redchester druggist would be master of New Court and of Earl's Dene together. If he could only quite rid himself of the ghost of Hugh! But that also would fade away in time.

Once more he knocked at the door, all the more boldly because a little nervously—for he too had begun to learn what is meant by nerves—and was once more shown into the drawing-room. Miss Raymond would be with him in a few minutes.

But the minutes were more than a few; and, being nervous, he began to grow impatient. He was not fond of girlish caprices that meant nothing and which wasted time. At last, after he had looked at all the pictures on the wall, turned over all the books on the table, looked out of both the windows, and pulled to pieces a crocus, the door opened. He turned round suddenly to meet his

future wife, and found himself face to face with Marie.

The heart of the conqueror of fate and circumstance sank within him. He turned pale, and reeled for an instant as if he had received a blow. Was Nemesis so strong then, after all, that it could call people from the very grave sooner than let itself be subdued by man?

Nor did he see Marie alone. A little behind her stood his Frankenstein-demon, Dick Barton, who had followed her into the room, and now stood just within the door with a grim smile of triumph in his eyes when he saw the effect of the vision upon his foe.

Marie's, however, were fixed on the ground as she entered slowly. When she raised them and fixed them upon his, it was as though she were indeed regarding him whom she had once thought she loved from beyond the unpassable gulf of a grave that had separated them forever.

"It is not I who have broken my promise," she said, in a low voice, but not timid like that of the Marie of old when she addressed those whom she loved or feared. "I have returned to life for a moment that my promise may not bring ruin to others. If I could, I would be dead indeed! But, until that time comes, I must not by my silence be the cause of leading you and others into sin and misery. I could not but let Miss Raymond know that your wife she can not be. And now—"

Even Warden's readiness failed him. The city of B— had not as yet been swallowed by an earthquake; and until that or some equal mischance should happen to it, his marriage could be proved. His conduct might appear to be as white as snow, that of Hugh as black as ink—Felix might be proved a very Mohammed of imposture—Miss Clare might make any number of new wills—Miss Raymond might have given him every scruple of her heart—but he was married to Marie; his lies, when he had denied it, stared him full in the face, and not only so, but in the faces of all the world. "If it were not for Marie," indeed! For Marie? She had been a curse to him from the beginning. If it were not for this girl he would have gained all that his soul desired; through her, all that he had done, all that he had gained, was changed into waste and loss. Through her, he, the practical man, had been led into chasing an impracticable dream—into wasting himself to gain nothing, and far less than nothing. To his self-reliant nature this was the hardest thing to bear of all; it was harder even than failure, to feel that the failure was of his own contriving.

He could, in his first desperate moment of mortification, have struck her down on the spot. But habit, perhaps also a new-born sense of fear, resumed its influence, and he found his tongue.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he asked. "I know too well that I have enemies," he added, with a fierce look at Barton, "but that you—"

Even now he felt that had he met Marie alone he might have prevented the betrayal of his secret, by regaining his old influence over her whom he had held subject to it for so long. But, while even an animal like Barton stood there to be a witness of what he might say, it was impossible. In one moment all that he had striven so hard to win, the grapes that were actually hanging with-
in his hand, the cup that was fairly at his lips,

became an incarnation of his evil genius in the person of a drunken ruffian and a girl. "If it were not for Marie?" No—if he had only not stayed his hand—if instead of practising all this barren diplomacy he had only actually done what it had once occurred to him to do—if he had only at one final irrevocable blow rid himself utterly and forever of her whose mere existence meant the death of all the hopes which he had lived to realize.

"It is best to say nothing," she said, with a ring in her voice that silenced him, and a steady look that made his own, for the first time in his life, seek the ground. "God knows I feel for you—that you can not wish we had never met more than I! You thought me dead, and I wished you to think so. I have come to life for a moment, not to return to you—not to be a burden upon you any more—but to save you from an error into which I myself led you, when that error would have proved fatal to you and to her whom you love. Even that I was unwilling enough to do for my own sake, God knows! If you could have been free to seek happiness with her, I too should have been happy in your happiness. You must not think me cruel—I also have my own load to bear. Indeed I could not have kept our secret, even if I had been justified in doing so. There were others—"

"Others?"

"Yes—I tried to keep my existence secret—but it became known, and then—ah, you do not know how near I was to death itself in order that our secret might be kept forever—that you might be free! But—well, it was not to be."

Could this be the meek-spirited child whose love he had carelessly thrown away! He began now to suspect that even had Barton not been there he would have found his old influence at an end with her who was beginning to make him feel hers. He was not one to appreciate that deepest kind of emotion of all, that, being beyond all words, can only express itself coldly and with restraint, any more than he was one to sympathize with the instinct that leads some few people in the world to do that which is right, come what may. He was even tempted to believe that her coldness of manner came from anger, and her conduct from jealousy and revenge.

"And now," she said at last, with a strange change of manner—in a tone of voice so devoid of life that he seemed to detect in it a shadow of contempt, of which in truth her voice was as incapable as her heart of containing towards any one, even towards him—"and now I shall return to my hidden life once more. I have saved you, and if I ever show myself to you again, it shall never be to your harm." She held out her hand, with something like the old tenderness. "Say that you forgive me," she said. "What else could I have done?" Her eyes were glistening, though her voice did not tremble even now.

But he held back his hand.

"No," he said, with a sudden burst that he could not control, "I do not forgive you. You have been my curse ever since I knew you. But do not think things will end here. I do not know what you may have said to Miss Raymond; but, judging from your companion, I do not fear but that I shall be able to deny it all. I will see Miss Raymond—there are two stories to tell, as you know. I suppose you have told her you are my

wife. But when did you last see Felix Cr  ville?"

The half-veiled threats were barren, and he knew it when he made them. She did not answer; but, with a look of infinite pity, seemed to his eyes to vanish like an apparition from the room.

Barton held the door open for her as if she had been a queen, closed it again, and then returned. The smile of triumph had gone.

"There," he said, without a tinge of mockery in his tone—"here is a note for you from Miss Raymond." Then, in his natural manner, he went on, "I suppose you set all this day's work down to me? If you do, I am proud to say you are right in your reckoning. Should you like to know how? It is always as well for a man to understand his position. You see—"

Warden took the note and turned his back contemptuously. He read as follows:

"You will understand why I have not seen you after seeing poor Marie, of whom I heard just before I last heard from you. I need not say that you must never think of our meeting again."

And that was all. Miss Raymond, with all her tendency to sentiment, was far too well regulated a young lady even to feel sentiment when it clashed with the code of propriety, far less to express it. But, though this was all, it was more than enough. Had he been alone, he would have vented some of his rage by tearing the paper into shreds; but, as it was, he deliberately folded it up as if it had been of no consequence, and placed it in his pocket. Then he rang the bell, and, having obtained pen, ink, and paper, wrote as follows:

"DEAR MISS RAYMOND,—I am far too overwhelmed by the blow that has fallen upon me—by my unexpected discovery that I am not free to address you—to seek an interview with you now. I am the most unfortunate man in the world. A faithless woman, whom I believed dead, stands between me and all my hopes of happiness. But, in spite of all things, always think of me as being still yours while I live—no less now than when I believed myself free. It is too late to conceal that I love you with all my soul. I can not ask for your love—but I claim your pity for the most unhappy man on earth.

"With or without hope, I shall live for you still. Yours, dear Miss Raymond, forever.

"M. WARDEN."

Having given orders that this should be delivered to Miss Raymond at once, he left the house. Many another man would, in his position, have gone straight to his chambers and blown out his brains. Conscience is not quite so good an advocate, not quite so corrupt a judge, when our affairs go ill as when they go well. It requires to be fed and bribed to bestow its consolation; and is apt to go over to the enemy when we can fee and bribe it no more.

And perhaps the fact that Warden did not succumb to that remorse which is the poignant consciousness of having failed by his own one piece of folly depended on the turning of a feather. For his consciousness of his failure was as poignant as his failure itself had been complete. His note to Miss Raymond had been but a flourish;

and he had scarcely meant it for any thing more. But it was not fated that his name was to be written in the list of suicides. He left the house and walked eastward. It is almost, nay, it is quite impossible to describe in words the mental and moral state of an ambitious and self-confident man who, at the very outset of his career, has to own to himself that he has already expended all his resources in destroying every prospect upon the attainment of which he had set his heart, and which he seemed already to have attained, and for the sake of which, moreover, he had committed what practically amounted to a crime. A man like him will not think evil evil if it ends in good fruit; but the doing of unsuccessful evil is simply the greatest blunder in the world, and haunts him with shame. He had deserted his wife, and slain his friend, and wasted his time and his energy, and toiled and plotted and lied, and all for nothing—so that the rest of his life, if he could find the heart to live it, must henceforth be spent in a slow and laborious attempt to rake together the merest crumbs of a feast that he had thrown away. It was as though all the blossom of the orchard, all the promise of an abundant harvest that foretold full reward for all the ceaseless care and toil of the husbandman, had been swept away by one hour of unseasonable frost in the midst of June.

Filled with an overwhelming disgust towards himself, and a sort of desperate hatred for all things and all people, that would for once, if he had had the chance, have induced him to forget his habitual prudence in a desire for revenge, he did not at first hear a heavy step behind him.

"Well, Warden," said Barton, who was not long in overtaking him, "you are an unlucky dog, I must say. Fancy you, of all men, having a wife hidden away out of sight, and of your letting her turn up just at the wrong time. But that's a way women have—not that it makes you less unlucky. But—what will the Dons at St. Margaret's say?"

That was another item in the stakes that he would have to pay to Fortune; and though in the greater disappointment he had forgotten it, it was, in one way, the heaviest item of all. His Fellowship was his only means of livelihood; and, that gone, he would be driven to begin his whole life over again, in order to keep clear of starvation. The bar, even, must be out of the question; so even must the Church; so must the career that the University gives to wranglers and medallists within her own walls. Nothing seemed open to him but to become a lawyer's clerk or an usher in a school.

The mere sound of Barton's voice acted like a sting. But he took no notice, and turned down the next street.

But Barton turned down the next street also.

"What in the name of common sense made you make such an ass of yourself? But, well—young men will be young men, I suppose, even though they understand the differential calculus; and I dare say they won't think the worse of you in the House. Only, to have married her! about that I am afraid you must expect to be laughed at, just a little. If you had only—"

Warden faced round.

"I beg," he said, "that you will go your way, and let me go mine."

"The devil you do! Well, I will." And he

kept on walking by Warden's side "I was saying—"

At last Warden stopped again.

"Am I to understand that you want to force a quarrel upon me?"

"Not the least—that's the sort of thing I leave to you. Only my way happens to be the same as yours, that's all."

"On the contrary. There lies your way, and there mine."

"I beg your pardon. I feel inclined for a little talk. I always feel friendly to a man who's down. Would-half a crown be any help to you? The 'Trumpet' owes me a few shillings—"

"You — blackguard," Warden began, regarding of consequences.

"*Arcades ambo*. That's all the more reason for our taking the same road. 'A fellow-feeling,' you know."

Warden, without condescending to reply, hailed a coach that happened to be passing, and got into it. He was driven to the Temple; but, on reaching the gate, the door of the coach was opened to him by Barton. Was he literally to be haunted forever by this demon whom he had raised to be his ruin?

"You might have offered me a seat," said the latter. "I dare say I shouldn't have taken it, for the coachman was a gentleman compared to us poor devils, and I always try to cultivate the society of my betters. You've paid him?" he asked, when the coach drove off and the two found themselves alone on the pavement of the court in which Warden lived. "That's right. Every one ought to pay his debts—and now I'm going to pay you mine."

"By taking yourself off, I hope."

"Presently. But first I am going to give you the biggest thrashing that I ever gave any man—and I have given a few in my time. Place and time are admirable. It is out of term, and we shan't be disturbed."

Warden turned a little paler for an instant, but looked him full in the face. "There are two words to that bargain," he said steadily, while he felt his blood begin to run faster, and his fingers closed involuntarily in his palms.

"There are no words at all—or, if there are, there is but one, and that's Dick Barton's."

"You drunken scoundrel!" said Warden, "if you think you are going to bully me into fighting you, you are mistaken. It is much more likely that you will bully me into giving you into custody."

"Do so, pray—and hear what I shall say before the Bench. I won't tell you why I mean to thrash you, but I'll tell his worship with pleasure."

"You are an insufferable bully, and a boaster besides. So take care. I know how to use my fists—perhaps better than you."

"A boaster? Not at all. Do I say that I'm the best Grecian since Porson? It's because I am. That I drink the hardest heads under the table? It's because I do. And I say that I shall thrash you into rags because I shall."

"And why, pray?"

"Because I choose. And so, you murdering rascal, you lying thief, you shall have three falls—one for Felix, one for Lester, and one for Esther Barton, if you know who that is: but first you shall have one for—"

In whose honor he struck the first blow must remain unknown, for the blow came before the word.

Warden, however, had not practised with the gloves in vain, and though he was the smaller, he had far more science—indeed Barton had no science at all—so the issue seemed doubtful. Besides, there is a sort of conventional notion abroad, utterly unfounded upon fact, that giants and boasters always get the worst of it. But Barton was not one to stand on trifles. He prided himself upon freedom from all rules, even those of the ring: and he meant winning with all his soul. In a very few seconds, by dint of sheer strength and weight, and of an utter carelessness whether he received any damage to himself or no, he, heedless of Warden's blows, simply rushed in, and by a wrestling trick, more effectual, perhaps, than fair, caught him up from the ground and threw him with all his force a good yard or two away.

The conqueror of circumstance came down with a sharp hard fall upon the flags of the empty court, so that he lay stunned. Barton's boasted strength had proved greater than even he had given himself credit for. But, having satisfied himself that his victim was not dead—

"No," he said to himself, "such dogs as that have cats' lives. I should like to have played with him a little longer, though. Well—we must hope he has broken a bone or two—that'll be something. And, if not, one can always give him the rest another time."

And so he left the Temple, leaving word at the porter's lodge that a gentleman was lying dead-drunk in Palm Court, and that it would be a charity to take him up to his chambers.

CHAPTER THE LAST.

Château de Croisville, March 1, 18——This is the anniversary of my birthday, which I have at last discovered. Not as people for the most part reckon birthdays: not the anniversary of the day on which I first saw the light, nor even, as I have until now reckoned mine, of that on which the light of the outer world first enters the soul as well as the eyes. It is the anniversary of the birthday of my true life—that is to say, of my happiness: of the day when I at last made my wife her whom I had learned to love while it seemed impossible that she could ever be mine while we lived.

And even now, the years that since then have passed by have only taught me that there is nothing so unreasonable as reckoning time by years. I mean that she is not a day older, nay, that she is younger, than when she first became my friend, and far more beautiful: and me her love has always kept young. Thank God, we have many a year yet to come before either of us feels old!

The story of my youth has therefore, in one sense, come to an end, though in another it has barely begun. When I look back upon the shadows—for they are in truth nothing more—that form the cast of the comedy, or tragedy, or tragic-comedy, of which I, from my own point of view, am the hero, I am bewildered by the minute complications of other shadowy lives that were necessary to bring about my own happiness: it seems to

me that others were made to mourn in order that I might rejoice, and that others were made to fail in order that I might succeed. Why should I have been singled out for happiness any more than any of the rest? But so it is; and nothing is left for me to do but to render myself as worthy of my happiness as I can. And that, with her to help me, surely ought not to be hard. My days of weakness ought to be nearly over, seeing that I have now been for so many years the owner of a twofold soul.

It seems to me that the lives of men and women are like a system of complicated curves, the laws of whose courses are undiscoverable; that cross and blend, diverge and converge, part and run parallel, without any apparent reason why they should do any one of these things more than any other. So it must be with every story, and not with mine alone, that professes to speak of the life-courses of men and women as they are, and not as we would have them be. Triangles, squares, and arcs of circles are much more agreeable and easy to deal with than those wild curves that form a labyrinth without order and without law. A story that is true to nature has of necessity no motive, no beginning, no middle, no end. It takes its rise in the land of shadows, it passes through mists, and to the land of shadows it returns—it is incomplete because it has no limit, not even that of death. And as for poetical justice, is it not the orthodox theory of this life that it is something which is wrong here to be set right hereafter? And, indeed, were it otherwise, what is called poetical justice would be, in truth, the greatest injustice of all, for the man never lived yet who deserved to be sentenced by man to perfect happiness or perfect misery. Life is not like those children's stories in which the good child both eats its cake and has it too: it is something far more unsatisfactory and far more noble.

So much have I come to feel this that I can look back without, I hope, too harsh a judgment even upon him who, for a time at least, seemed to hold in his hand the threads of the lives of us all, and to knot and entangle them for his own purposes according to his will. I am glad that, rendered desperate as I was at the time, the punishment that so suddenly and so unexpectedly overtook him did not come from my hand. Indeed I should have mistrusted my own motives had I not been forestalled in my plans of vengeance; for his death meant for me not only the fulfillment of vengeance for the past, but life and happiness to come. As it was, my own ideas did not go beyond a pistol-shot, in order that I might do to him what he had done to me and mine; while in fact the punishment—for as a punishment his fate, seeing that it was the direct consequence of his own deeds, must be considered—was of a kind that seems almost too heavy to be deservedly inflicted upon any man whose life is before him still. And yet—so hard is it to arrive at any conclusion of the matter—it may be that, after all, he was dealt with more mercifully than if he had recovered from the fearful injuries that he had received on the very day on which his triumph had seemed so secure, and had he been able to recommence a prosperous and even more than successful career. Terrible must the doom have been for that energetic and ambitious man to have to linger out those two long years

—how long they seemed to me also!—in a paralysis of body and prostration of mind that was worse than death, a burden upon his father and sister, without daring even to call upon the law to avenge him upon Hugh's avenger, and to have to feel that it had been his own energy, his own ambition, that had led to it all, even to the very manner of his death: to feel that having, by his real merits, grasped an honest substance, he had not only deprived himself of it by expending all his power in clutching at a shadow, but had overreached his balance so as to sink hopelessly beneath the stream: to find that he had wasted his labor in building his house upon the sand. This must indeed have been terrible: but, supposing that he had recovered from his bodily injuries, that he had faced the world once more, that he had achieved the worldly success that must inevitably have come to such a man at last, if he only lives long enough, the wise know that to such as he success carries its own sting. An unshared triumph is no triumph at all: and the sympathy that might have been his both through good and ill, he had thrown away for the sake of the same shadow for which he had thrown away more material good. It had been the fable of the dog over again. And so, perhaps, something not unlike poetical justice in its very highest sense had been dealt, after all, if it is true that mercy is the highest mode of justice. His offense had been the heart of stone; and that needs no additional weight to render it harder to bear—it is its own punishment, in the long run, as surely as the warm heart, however much it may suffer, is its own ample reward. Better, will the wise man hold, would be the life of even such as poor Dick Barton; and that is saying much indeed. It is true that when a devil such as his once gets hold of a man it may never be exorcised. But I, speaking for myself, and with my whole heart, can say that he had made one friend, and I have every reason to believe that, before he died, he had obtained one glimpse, none the less real because it had been short and transient, of higher things than even Greek tragedy. Even though the vision of what may be for others and what might have been for him, as it came to him angel-wise in the person of her whom he called his sister, and who, to him, was Esther Barton to the end, had crossed the desert of a life like his only for one passing moment, and only to leave the desert to all outward appearance blacker than before, still he had for that one moment actually seen the light which he who had held in his hand the key to its most secret chamber had never seen and was incapable of seeing. He whose eyes have once been opened can never be as if he had always been blind; and though the rose may open but to leave behind it only its thorns, still they are the thorns of the rose. He, too, before his life came to an end, if he had not really enjoyed the fulfillment of what Schiller's heroine calls all earthly happiness, had at least felt, I think, if he had not understood, what life and its highest happiness may mean—and even so much as that is the lot of but a fortunate few. And so, while Warden would, unless the unchangeable may change, have passed through a successful career such as, had he survived, must have been his, without finding any thing worth the finding, the unsuccessful man had found something in life—or rather

something had come to him—which was worth not only the finding but the keeping also, and which, though it brought with it the fullness of an unspeakable regret, saved him from the worst sort of death that lies in despair. To the outer world, to all but to me, it need not be said, he remained the same Dick Barton, or nearly the same, and as such is he remembered: but, at the end, it was not his deepest soul that spoke, although he died with the brandy-bottle by his side, and on his lips the words—

*"Panta gelos, cai panta conta, cai panta to meden—
Panta gar ez alogon esti ta ginomena."*

"All is laughter, and all is dust, and all is nothing: for out of foolishness come all things that are."

Once more—if I am right—God be praised for that and for all things! From the land of dreams and shadows I have passed into that of realities: from that of passion into that of love: from that of what men call art into that of nature. It is true that not one of my ambitious aspirations has been fulfilled: they, too, belong to the land of dreams. So far, I own, my life has been a failure. I have not become a Moretti, not even a Prosper. But what then? It only proves that I once mistook talent and love of art for Genius, and that I have become wise enough to make the mistake no more. I am not so childish as to complain when my true life is still developing within me and around me day by day.

Certainly my life has been in any case an eventful one. Born a noble, in childhood a peasant, in youth a struggling artist, to suddenly find myself heir to one of the finest estates in England, I ought to have learned something. If I had but had my mother's love instead of her wealth, I think I should have learned all. Wealth, poverty, the friendship of man, the love of woman—those four sources of experience—have been mine; but the fifth I lost, even while I grasped it, to my lasting sorrow. Since the day when I parted with Earl's Dene to an English purchaser in order that I might become a brother to my father's people, my one regret has been, that my alien training had unfitted me to become a brother to my mother's people also. But I hope that England will forgive me for thinking that a more useful life, both to myself and to others, was open to me as a *propriétaire* in the department of Doubs, than as a country gentleman in the county of —, and for giving to the tenants of Earl's Dene an English banker for their landlord, instead of a French musician. For my part I am sure that England has gained by the exchange, whether France has lost by it or no. Now I trust that my life may deserve to be called eventful only so far as a strong will to make my own country the gainer also may make it so; and, with Marie to aid me, I trust not wholly to fail.

March 2d.—Two long letters to-day, both at once, from our two exiles—one from Madame l'Ambassadrice Fleurette, at St. Petersburg—one from Monsieur le Capitaine Ernest, at Marseilles. That shoemaker's shop at Denethorp is already the birthplace of a great lady: I hope it may prove to be that of a great man also. Well, they seem to be happy and unspoiled in their exile, and so make all the greater the happiness of us who stay at home among the hills.

When we had finished reading them I went out for my usual morning's walk with Loup the third: on my return—

"Felix," said my wife, "the curé has just been here, wanting particularly to see you."

Now there was nothing wonderful in this, for Father Laurent's successor, though a little afraid of me on the score of my liberal ideas, always pays me the compliment of coming to the château when earthly rather than heavenly aid is needed by any of his parishioners.

"Well what is it? Nothing is the matter in the village, I hope. The good father is rather a bird of ill omen, you know."

"I do not know what it is. He only said that he must see you."

"What! has he not found out yet that you are the same as I? I should have thought that all the parish knew that by this time."

"Ah, but people don't come to you about every thing, you know—they come to me sometimes; and so perhaps it is now your turn to have some special confidence. And the father seemed so excited about it, and so important and mysterious—"

"That you think it must be something more than a bad case of rheumatism? Well, we shall see." Serious troubles and mysteries were not in the habit of finding their way into St. Félix; and how, above all, could they on a day which had brought us news of our children's happiness?

"Well," I said, "we shall soon see what it is. Is Father Perrin here?"

"He said he would wait till you came in."

"Ah, then he was wise enough to know that my flight from you would not be a long one. I will see him immediately."

"Monsieur le Marquis," said the curé, when I entered the room where he was waiting for me, "I am in a great difficulty. Yesterday evening, when I had just returned from vespers, I heard a knock at the door."

So far there was certainly no difficulty, though, from his pause, he seemed to think that I should think so. I waited for him to go on.

"I opened it, and saw a woman."

"Indeed! And who was she?"

"She was a stranger. I had never seen her before."

A stranger in St. Félix! I should not have wondered if the curé had believed himself to have discovered another in the list of modern miracles.

"And what did she want? where did she come from?"

"She had just come from Pontarlier, so she said. I asked her what was her business, and she asked if this was St.-Félix-des-Rochers. Then she inquired if the Marquis de Croisville did not live here, and if he was at home."

"Well?"

"I asked her who she was and what she wanted, but she would only say that she must see you at once—as soon as you could be found: and she asked the way to the château."

"What was she like? How did she come?"

"On foot, I believe. She was quite tired out, and wet through. I thought she would have dropped down while she was speaking."

"On foot—what! and last night, in all that snow? Why, one would think she must have perished. Did she tell you nothing more?"

"She either would not, or was unable from fa-

tigue. She only said that she must see you at once, and she would have gone straight to the château, if I and Madame Michot would have allowed her."

"This is strange indeed. But what did she look like?"

"If she had been younger—if she had been better dressed—if she had been anywhere but here—if she had not claimed acquaintance with Monsieur le Marquis—if I knew any thing about such things—if—"

"Well?"

"I should have thought her some unhappy woman who—at any rate, I thought it best not to speak to madame first. And so I thought it best—of course I don't mean any thing if she really knows Monsieur le Marquis—to let her pass the night with Madame Michot, and to see you myself the first thing in the morning."

Well, how should he know any thing about my old life? The most steady and respectable of men may not always have been so; and so, as the affair was certainly mysterious, I forgave him his suspicion.

"And her age?"

"I should say she might be forty—or perhaps five-and-thirty—or perhaps five-and-forty—or perhaps—"

"And what does Madame Michot think?"

"Only that she must be a Parisienne, from her way of speaking and her white hands. She fell sound asleep from fatigue as soon as she lay on the bed, and has lain there ever since without moving. As I said, she was quite worn out. What does monsieur wish to be done?"

"That we will see presently. If she knows me, I have no doubt I shall remember her. Meanwhile I will go and see her at once."

But first I went back for a moment to Marie, and told her what I had heard from the curé.

"Poor woman!" she said, "who in the world can she be, in such distress, and coming to see you here? Do not be long—and I will send down at once what she must want after last night. I will not come myself, as she might wish to see you alone."

Marie did know my old life; and, if she had not, it would have made no difference. She knew as well as I that there was nothing and could be nothing that could ever come between her and me.

So I went at once with the curé. At his door we were met by his housekeeper, Madame Michot, who was straining her eyes for us along the road.

"Oh, Monsieur le Marquis, Monsieur le Curé," she exclaimed excitedly, "come and see!"

We all went up stairs together.

But the curé was not to have his mystery solved: another of the shadows out of which my life had been woven had passed away. No one on this earth will ever know the whole story of Angélique Lefort. From the day of poor Hugh Lester's death in that fatal duel—or at least from the day on which she heard that she was a widow—she had disappeared from the sight and knowledge of us all. It is true that I had heard rumors, but they were such as I had not dared to repeat to Marie: her ignorance of her cousin's

fate, though it caused her sole unhappiness, was better than a knowledge that would have overwhelmed her pure soul with sorrow and shame. And to Paris, where Marie had lived during the two years before she also became a widow, I have no reason to think that Angélique ever came. Her character was as mysterious in death as it had been in life. I knew the history of her marriage from the beginning: I, as I have said, guessed something of her after-life; and yet, in spite of all things, with a mysterious inconsistency, there lay over her dead heart a miniature of Hugh—of him whom she had deceived, despised, and destroyed. It was her last and only possession.

Had she, also, when it was too late, come to have a vision of the light? What regrets had filled her soul—what disappointments caused her to plunge recklessly into a life of despair? What thoughts had she had to keep down, what memories to destroy? By what paths of distress had she travelled to reach at length the home of him whose love she had thrown away? The instinct that led her to the home of Marie could not have been false—but, beyond this, the answers to all these questions and to a hundred more, like the picture of him whom she had destroyed, were buried in her grave. For myself, I could not be otherwise than relieved that it was so. Marie's suspense might now be over, and she might mourn for her heroine, for her sister, without shame.

March 2d, 18—.—Yesterday I counted another birthday; with equal thankfulness for what is, and with equal hope for what is to come. As each year goes by, the clouds of my life roll more and more from memory: the sky becomes more blue and the sun more golden. And our lives—our life, I should rather say, for we have but one between us—grow stronger, too, as well as more full of happiness. I have to-day, with Marie, visited the grave of her whom we had both loved—she with all the passion of a friend, I with all that of a lover; and we both felt that we loved each other more and more. How she prayed I know not: my prayer—not only for her—was contained in two words—"Thou knowest."

I have at last set about composing the Fantaisie of which I dreamed years ago, and which I meant to call "*Pré-aux-Fleurs*." No one will understand it, and I do not care whether it is understood or no. I am making it just as I please; and if the critics—as no doubt they will, should chance, which Heaven forbid! ever bring it into their hands—talk of consecutive fifths, hidden octaves, false relations, and all manner of other heresies, so much the worse for them, not for me. I am, after all, a pupil of Jean-Baptiste, not of Moretti. Let the world go on with its own false relations, and make the best of them. What is art but a part of life? and is life all harmony—all cut and dried according to rule? Can it—ought it to be so? Alas if this were all!—

"Mais la Nature est là, qui t'invite et qui t'aime:

Plonge-toi dans son sein, qu'elle t'ouvre toujours;
Quand tout change pour toi la Nature est la même,
Et le même soleil se lève sur tes jours."

Yes—the same nature, the same sunshine, and the same Marie!

THE END.

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